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FIRST THINGS

August/September 1994
Number 45

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

Awakening from Nihilism
Michael Novak

The Family and the Constitution
David Wagner

Blacks and Jews Entangled
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The Prudence of John Henry Newman
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OPINIONS

John E. Coons on School Choice
James Seaton on Christopher Lasch
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Peter L. Berger on Gaia

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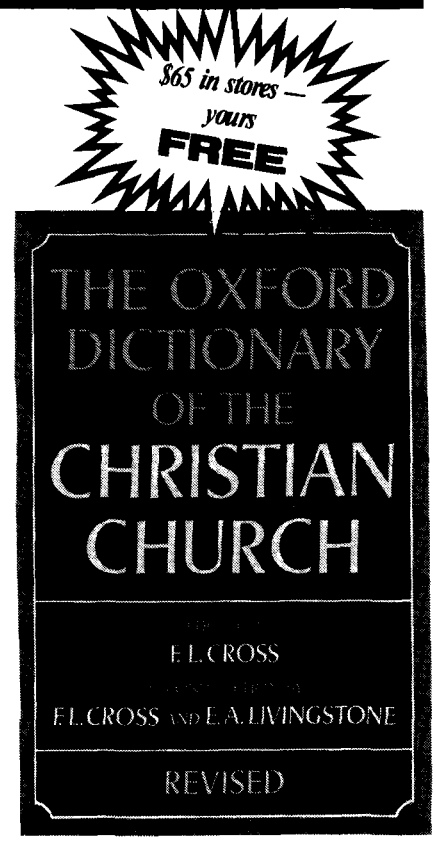

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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1994 • NUMBER 45

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A Counter-Response

As members of the National Association of College and University Chaplains (NACUC), we want to offer a response to the article "The Homosexual Movement: A Response by the Ramsey Colloquium" (March). Since this essay sets out to "form a moral judgment regarding this new thing in our public life," namely, "The Homosexual Movement," it seems imperative that other scholars and clergy make their response to the Ramsey Colloquium. As chaplains in colleges and universities across the country whose ministry is with and among all students, faculty, and staff, including lesbians and gay men, we offer the following response.

The members of the Ramsey Colloquium assert that they (and presumably all people) simply "are who they are" and that our bodies "participate in our personhood in a fundamental way"; they then continue and write of one's sexual orientation as though it were governed by whim or fad—a "movement," a matter of "recreation or taste, not unlike one's preference in diet, dress, or sport . . . simply a difference in lifestyle"—a lifestyle that they judge to be in the same category with alcoholism and violence.

It seems extraordinary to us that a group of eminent scholars, writing in 1994, could write in such a superficial and impersonal manner about an aspect of human nature that, in their own words, defines one's personhood "in a fundamental way"; they clearly overlook the growing body of scholarly, religious work about sexuality and religion. Further, it seems to us that the writers challenge their own logic when they treat sexual orientation as though it were a mere fad or "movement" but then go on to acknowledge that "some scientific evidence suggests a genetic predisposition for homosexual orientation."

The writers of the Ramsey Colloquium article declare that "it is dehumanizing to define ourselves or our personhood as male or female by our desires alone," suggesting that lesbians and gay men have so defined themselves. It is, however, the Ramsey Colloquium members themselves who so dehumanize everyone of homosexual orientation, without distinction, precisely by defining them exclusively according to their desires. There is no reference to the longtime commitment, lovingkindness, and caring unto death demonstrated by many gay and lesbian people. There is no reference to the many stable, two-parent lesbian and gay families in which children are being raised. There is no reference to the ways in which families are destroyed when parents and siblings "disown" their gay and lesbian family members. And there is no reference to the contributions that gays and lesbians make to family life.

Instead, the writers repeatedly allude to the effects of those desires in an exclusively negative manner with assertions of "sexual promiscuity, depression and suicide . . . within the homosexual subculture," as well as "seduction and solicitation." Has evidence of these been the prevailing discovery of the writers concerning the gay men and women whom they number among their friends, colleagues, and families? Are such friends and colleagues "doing damage to innumerable individuals and to our common life"? While the authors focus on the so-called "sexual revolution," we suggest that the sexual revolution should be viewed with the concurrent civil rights movement; together these movements helped foster justice and integrity in all human relationships, be they sexual or not. The writers, however, focus only on the sexual revolution and put gay and lesbian sexuality in the same category with "permissive abortion, widespread adultery, easy divorce, radical feminism" as well as "predatory behavior." One might gather a long list of dehumanizing, manipulative, often violent behaviors demonstrated by persons of heterosexual orientation, such as rape, wife-battering, child molestation, incest, and murder, stories about which we read in each day's newspapers; would that be sufficient evidence to

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judge all heterosexual people as moral threats to society?

What is more helpful to and supportive of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, is the development of sexual ethics that apply to all relationships. Such ethics include the qualities of love, trust, mutuality, justice, monogamy, and covenant, along with many others. The witness of countless lesbian and gay relationships proves that these qualities can and do exist in intimate, loving relationships between members of the same sex; likewise, those qualities can and do exist in relationships between members of the opposite sex. The gender of the individuals in any given relationship is not the defining characteristic of what makes the relationship good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, life-giving or destructive.

In the words of the Ramsey Colloquium, we wholeheartedly affirm that "Our bodies have their own dignity, bear their own truths, and are participant in our personhood in a fundamental way." We affirm this truth for all people, straight, lesbian, and gay.

Joan Austin, Elizabethtown College; James P. Breeden, Dartmouth College; Martha Cash Burless, Mount Union College; Deene Clarke, Amherst College; John Colatch, Ferrum College; Janet Cooper Nelson, Brown University; Ben Curry; Ron Flowers, Wesley Foundation at Georgia State University; Jan Fuller Carruthers, Hollins College; Peter J. Gomes, Harvard University and the Divinity School; Larry Green; David Harper, Dickinson College; Donovan E. Hull, Hamline University; Robert L. Johnson, Cornell University; Stanley B. Johnson, University of Pennsylvania; Rabbi Joseph H. Levine, DePauw University; Stuart C. Lord, DePauw University; Tom Modd, University of Texas Medical Branch, Texas A&M (Galveston), Galveston College; C. Jay Pendleton, Pfeiffer College; Janna Roche, Hamilton College; Frederick J. Streets, Yale University; Cynthia A. Terry, Yale University; Charlie Wallace, Willamette University; Joseph C. Williamson, Princeton University; D. Darrell Woomer, Lebanon Valley College

An Exchange on Life and Death

While I was fascinated by Daniel Callahan's article in "The Sanctity of Life Seduced" and the responses to it (April), I was concerned by the automatic acceptance of some facts and conclusions that do not hold up under scrutiny. As we all know, good ethics must be backed by accurate facts.

Take the "persistent vegetative state," an offensive and dehumanizing term coined in 1972 and used to describe a level of brain injury that assumes the permanent loss of upper brain function. Proponents of not feeding the "vegetative" have long been frustrated by the lack of a diagnostic test for this condition and the surprising number of reports of "vegetative" people who recover, sometimes even to full mental function. This includes not only media stories about people such as Carrie Coons, but also studies like the one reported in the June 1991 issue of *Archives of Neurology* which found that 58 percent of people with a firm diagnosis of PVS recovered consciousness within the three-year follow-up interval of the study. Just as importantly, the researchers were unable to identify factors that could predict in advance which patients will ultimately wake up. It is hard to escape the conclusion that PVS has become a political, rather than a medical, diagnosis.

As a nurse who has personally witnessed the recovery of supposedly hopeless patients, I am not surprised by these studies and reports. What has surprised and frightened me is the practical reality that many brain-injured people are no longer even given the chance to recover. For example, families have been told that their brain-injured loved one has a nil or virtually nil chance of recovery *within hours* after the precipitating event despite the lack of certitude. The false picture of Nancy Cruzan as an unmoving, unresponsive corpse hooked up to an array of machinery is a powerful and terrifying image to these families in crisis. It does a terrible injustice to people for us doctors, nurses, and ethicists to pretend to know things we cannot know—presumably in order to spare patients and their families potential further suffering. Have we become so callous about death that we can be comfortable with denying a person even a chance at recovery?

Another fact Mr. Callahan's article fails to mention is that the controversy over assisted feeding has spilled over to other care and other conditions. For example, the non-technological spoon-feeding of the supposedly "vegetative" Christine Busalacchi was considered just as ethically useless as tube feeding by Fr. Kevin O'Rourke, the director of the Center for Health Care Ethics at St. Louis University. . . . It has proved both legally and ethically impossible to limit non-feeding to just the "vegetative." The result has been the opening of a virtual Pandora's box of ethically rationalized death decisions such as rationing and even, in some cases, physician-assisted suicide.

I also must take issue with the anti-technology conclusions of Mr. Callahan. I fear he forgets that medical innovations, both technological and non-technological, result from a desire to cure, treat, or palliate suffering conditions, not out of a desire to torture people. For example, feeding tubes were not invented over one hundred years ago to "cure death" or interfere with the peaceful, painless deaths our ancestors supposedly had. Feeding tubes were invented to relieve real cases of real suffering. For example, it would be maddening to watch a three-year-old starve to death because his throat was irreparably burned. It is thus not surprising that some compassionate person would invent a way to feed people who cannot swallow.

Mr. Callahan is right when he describes an "inability to eat" or "a failing desire to eat" as a part of the natural dying process. This is true, for example, in end-stage cancer when, as organs fail, the body cannot assimilate or excrete food and fluids. In these cases, we do not deny food and fluids, but rather we give people what little they desire or need. Feeding tubes are not instituted in these cases because food and water are futile and would cause more discomfort as flu-

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ids build up in the body. These people do not dehydrate to death; they die of their cancer.

However, it is a very different matter in situations of anorexia nervosa, obstruction, paralysis, diminished consciousness, etc. To equate the inability to walk to a refrigerator or to get food past a damaged esophagus, etc., with a true dying process is patently false. Moreover, while truly dying people experience little if any discomfort from a reduced intake, dehydration is a miserable condition for the non-dying. I often care for people with an admitting diagnosis of dehydration. Quite frankly, these people feel and look rotten. They are weak, frightened, and often confused. After successful treatment, they perk up and are elated with the change in their condition. We are not prolonging death, we are treating an uncomfortable condition.

After twenty-five years of nursing, dealing with bioethical issues on both a personal and professional basis, and serving on both medical and nursing ethics committees, I have witnessed a sea change in ethics from what is *right* to what is *legal* to now what is *cost-effective*. Even the newly sacrosanct ethic of family or individual "choice" regarding a right to die is fast eroding under the juggernaut of new ethical thought that redefines "futility" and agonizes over "wasting" health care resources. Witness the recent case where a young Detroit couple were replaced as guardians after failed attempts by health care providers to induce them to discontinue the treatment of their critically ill, brain-damaged two-month-old.

Recovery is now being redefined as full or near-normal return of mental and physical function, which flies in the face of the reality all of us in health care know and reinforces the unhappy bias that the disabled have long tried to dispel.

Mr. Callahan presents us a false choice between either an awful, technologically prolonged death or a simple, painless passage into the Great Beyond without "technology." Instead, I have often presided at the deaths of people where the only medical interventions employed were to provide comfort. I have often silently blessed the discoverers of morphine, oxygen tubes, and air beds as I held hands with the dying patient and his or her family.

I have also silently wondered at the great gift of life as I fed, washed, and talked to the comatose, the confused, the severely disabled, and the truly dying. I have often sat with families and patients discussing do-not-resuscitate orders, the pros and cons of treatments, hopes and dreams, and inevitably, in some cases, how death will come. Not once did I feel that the patient or I was diminished in dignity or wasting health care resources.

Thus, I must take exception to Mr. Callahan's view that health care providers are prone to a "technological seduction." I am just one of many doctors and nurses who advocate against overtreatment just as strongly as we advocate against undertreatment. But medicine is not perfect; mistakes do happen. Just as some people die during a simple appendectomy, outcomes are often unpredictable. Decisions about technology are not automatically wrong if the outcome is less than hoped for or expected.

Rather than fighting a supposed "technological seduction," I submit that the biggest problem in ethics today is a "death seduction." I suspect that it is a fear of loss of control and a disdain for dependency, as well as a fascination with cost/benefit analysis, rather than an acceptance of inevitable death that leads many ethicists to support the so-called "right to die." (Oddly, the development of newer and exotic technologies such as in vitro fertilization have been virtually immune from a similar cost/benefit analysis and criticism of technological seduction.)

Sadly, Mr. Callahan's views inevitably distort the reality of inevitable death for all of us into a "duty to die" for some of us.

Nancy Guilfoy Valko, R.N.
St. Louis, MO

Daniel Callahan replies:

I find Ms. Valko's letter somewhat baffling, uncertain whether we disagree as much as she implies or whether I have made the factual errors she attributes to me. She begins by talking about the persistent vegetative state, noting that there have been many mistaken diagnoses. But at no place in my article did I discuss the special problem of diagnosing the condition. In fact, I fully agree with her about the many mistakes that have been made, and no less agree that it's wrong to give up on patients too quickly; of course every patient should have a chance at recovery.

I think she is herself wrong, however, to say that "PVS has become a political, rather than a medical, diagnosis." The problem is that any diagnosis of the syndrome (it is not a specific disease) must be probabilistic and based on indirect evidence. This is also true of Alzheimer's Disease, definitively diagnosable only in a postmortem autopsy—but no one doubts the existence of such a condition. As Ms. Valko herself says at the end of her letter, "medicine is not perfect; mistakes do happen." Why does she not apply her own standard in the case of mistaken diagnoses of PVS, instead of implying it is a fictitious condition?

It is quite true that I did not mention that "the controversy over assisted feeding has spilled over to other care and other conditions." I was not trying to write an article on the full range of conditions under which it might, or might not, be justified to terminate treatment. I have done that in *The Troubled Dream of Life* and, with her, I do not believe it right to limit feeding under any of the circumstances she mentions. I also agree that a person who cannot walk to a refrigerator is not dying and I have explicitly denied there is evidence to show we are "wasting" money on the dying (in *Setting Limits*, pp. 130-133).

I do not believe that I come to anti-technological conclusions. Technology can not only helpfully and validly save and extend life, but it can also provide many means of comfort for the critically ill and dying. My concern is our culture's obsession with technology, which too often leads us to use it unthinkingly and insensi-

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tively. As I said in the article, "If technology threatens to leave us worse off, and we nonetheless feel obliged to use it, we have then indeed become its slaves." I also argued that "doctors should feel as great an anxiety that a patient will die a poor death from technological excess as the present anxiety that the patient will die because there is too little technology." When she says that she worries both about undertreatment as well as overtreatment, it seems to me that Ms. Valko and I are not that far apart.

Finally, I find no basis whatever in the article I wrote for saying that my "views inevitably distort the reality of inevitable death for all of us into a 'duty to die' for some of us." I reject totally the idea of a duty to die, and always have. It is unwarranted and insulting to attribute that view to me.

Thinking About Abortion

Hadley Arkes ("Abortion Facts and Feelings," April) ignores the distinction between "human" and "person" alluded to by Jenny Teichman and Richard John Neuhaus in Correspondence (same issue) and recognized centuries earlier by Aquinas.

If persons are created "in the image of God," unique DNA and developing organ systems are less relevant to the debate over abortion than the stage of development of the nervous system and cerebral cortex that would permit the "Godlike" functions of being aware and of being able to interact consciously with one's environment. Neurobiologists have found that human fetuses do not reach that stage until some time after twenty-eight weeks of gestation and thus should not be regarded as persons before that time. Certainly, of course, pregnant women may and generally do "ascribe" personhood to wanted fetuses much earlier.

In the real world 91 percent of abortions are performed during the first trimester and fewer than 0.01 percent after twenty-four weeks (viability). So the trimester formulation of *Roe v. Wade* makes sense.

Finally, voting records in Congress, as Catholics for a Free Choice has reported, show that pro-choice lawmakers are generally much more likely than their anti-choice colleagues to support legislation that could be characterized as "pro-life" in the broadest sense.

Edd Doerr
Americans for Religious Liberty
Silver Spring, MD

Hadley Arkes makes a fine case for trying to pass laws that will not only save some lives but establish a philosophical basis for more pro-life action. To this list, I would add a law that I think would send shock waves through both the pro-life and pro-choice movements. This would be a law to require anesthesia for any fetus with a functioning nervous system, before an abortion is performed.

Such a law would have many virtues. First, it would save many children from the incredible pain that is now inflicted upon them. It would be a merciful law, one that would permit death but not permit suffering.

Second, it would force everyone to focus on the fact that the nervous system of a fetus is developed very soon, and that many forms of abortion must be horribly painful to the victim. Congressional hearings on this law would bring the essence of abortion before the American people.

Third, requiring anesthesia would be a strong sign of the dignity and worth of the fetus. It would clearly indicate that the unborn child is not some mass of tissue, but a small, living creature.

Fourth, those who argue against such a law would be put in the difficult position of defending causing suffering by the innocent. It would indeed be a terrible position to defend.

Kevin Clark
Front Royal, VA

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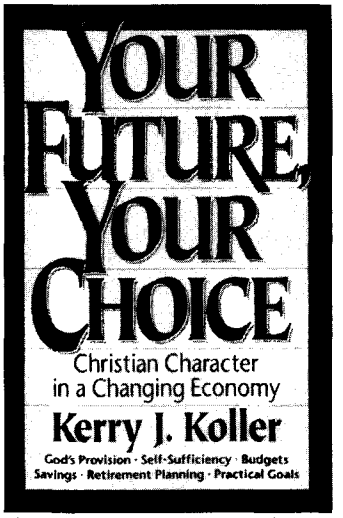
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Hadley Arkes replies:

Until that primate we loosely call a "human being" can actually speak to us in sentences, he cannot tell us of the reasons that animate his acts. Until that moment, we must ever remain on shaky ground if we claim to pronounce on the question of what he "knows," or of what he is "conscious." Professors in the neural sciences are always warning us about the temptation to draw inferences about "internal states" from "output states." A newborn child flails about and sucks his thumb, and observers suffer no strain in imputing "consciousness" to this lively being before them. But the child is no more luminous, in revealing what it knows, than it was when it was sucking its thumb within the womb—well in advance of twenty-four weeks. There are ample signs to suggest that the child is "responding to its environment" well within the first trimester—if that happens to be a test of "consciousness." But why should it be, any more, say, than any other sign of liveliness or "life"? Long ago, we could take EEG readings from the fetal brain as early as forty-three days. But then, why should that be taken as more of a sign of life than that evident "vital" process, which is driving everything forward; that vital principle, already engaged, sustaining growth, and insuring that the brain and heart and everything else will appear at their proper stages and do this distinct work?

The test then for consciousness gives way to the test for life itself. And indeed, why should that not be? Does Mr. Doerr suppose that somewhere, along the scale of consciousness, the organism undergoes a change of species? We are dealing, from the first moments, with beings who are never anything other than human beings. The distinction between a "person" and a "fetus" is nothing more than a contrivance of rhetoric: It is put forth with the trappings of a scientific distinction, as though it marked beings in different kingdoms or species. But Mr. Doerr deceives both himself and his readers if he imagines that he is really offering here a distinction of scientific consequence. The function of this distinction is not to describe, but to carry out a moral shift: By describing the child in the womb as something less than a "person," we justify a decision to remove from that child the protections of law that would attach to any other human being.

Under the false colors of the neural sciences, Mr. Doerr has simply devised another variant on a common fallacy: the willingness to draw moral conclusions on the basis of "facts" that are wholly wanting in moral significance; facts that cannot supply the ground of a moral conclusion. If he is laboring under the assumption that what he is offering here is even plausible as neural science, I would be happy to supply him with phone numbers and some useful tutors. But behind his argument is something more than a scientific mistake, and it will not be corrected with more precise information. I detect in his letter a powerful motive to find a rationalization for the killing that constitutes abortion, preferably by showing that there is no killing, because there is nothing there to be killed. This motive is by now so common that this form of argument is widely diffused in our public discourse.

Back to Rome?

I found Pastor Leonard Klein's commentary "Lutherans in Sexual Commotion" (May) to be a very impressive critique, both in terms of historical and theological-political analysis, of the movement for "sexual relativism" at the cost of basic scriptural authority and truth. I applaud his keen sense of objectivity and judgment in dealing with such a divisive issue within his own faith community. . . .

However, it is not the existence of vocal and active "secular" elements within the Christian community that is the most disturbing and dangerous problem. Raucous debate over theological understanding, social morality, and scriptural truth is not bad in-and-of itself. We have plenty of these same voices and special interest groups within the Roman Catholic Church also.

The most dangerous issue at hand is not the content of the debate, but the context, or lack thereof, in which it is being conducted. In other words, the danger to orthodox Christianity does not lie in unorthodox and politically motivated laypersons. The real threat to orthodoxy and biblical and historical truth exists in the procedural liberalism that is unavoidably present within the Protestant ecclesia.

Pastor Klein clearly explains this inherent weakness in the "representative" Protestant bureaucracy: "Another reason for the specific shape of this misfortune is the commitment of the ELCA and most other Protestant denominations to representation as the best way to seek theological and ethical truth." In addition, he poignantly points out that these difficulties are exacerbated by the existence of apostate clergy and bishops who are failing to fulfill their office of "defenders of the faith." . . .

My question to Pastor Klein and to others is: If the Protestant commitment to representational theology is fundamentally flawed, and those who are charged with defending the faith seem to be arbitrary and capricious, why should mainline Protestant denominationalism continue?

Furthermore, Pastor Klein eloquently explains his view of why true Lutheranism has been abandoned. He sums it all up in this statement: "At the Rubicon of Protestantism, there was no modern Protestant in the room. Luther and company were medieval catholics on a mission to reform." Therefore, Lutherans et al. must consider whether or not the reforms that Luther fought for have been accomplished. If the answer is "yes they have," then the right thing to do (for themselves, Christendom, and the true Word of God) is to return to Catholicism. . . .

Robert V. Swain
Seattle, WA

In Leonard Klein's "Lutherans in Sexual Commotion," it cannot go unobserved that the notion of the ELCA standing "on the conservative side of mainline Protestantism" is at best an attempt at humor, at worst an utter falsehood (or misguided observation). Nor, as his article goes on to

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demonstrate, would it pass for much in the way of a compliment, either.

As a Missouri Synod Lutheran (LCMS) I thank Pastor Klein for not considering the LCMS to be a mainline body. While I initially regarded his judgment as somewhat insulting, upon further reading I considered it to be quite complimentary. I thank him for clearly distinguishing the ELCA from the LCMS throughout the article.

That being said, Pastor Klein's other observations are both enlightening and accurate. Today's Christian church—all Lutherans included—needs more people like Pastor Klein to stand up and be counted. . . .

What passes for serious scholarship and reflection among certain circles of pastors, theologians, academicians, and administrators would have been considered heresy in earlier times. . . . Finding and cultivating strong, conservative leadership should be a high priority for the church—at all organizational levels—in the years ahead. Maybe then the church can effectively fulfill its true mission.

Arthur D. Lyons
Kennesaw, GA

Praise from Spain

As a First Things subscriber who has been living and working in Spain for several months now, I have not written to you for quite some time, partly because I get my issues about a month late. This time, however, as late as it gets to you, I couldn't resist.

The symposium on *Veritatis Splendor*, as well as your responses to the encyclical's critics (January and February), were commendable. One thing that lends First Things integrity as an intellectual journal is the degree to which you quote and allow "air time" for those who disagree with you. In many instances, you follow well the old Socratic practice of "giving enough rope to an opponent so that he may hang himself." A great example was the quotation of the *National Catholic Reporter* writer who held up a "positive, affirming, all-embracing . . . big umbrella" Christ, against the "negative, authoritarian" bad-boy Pope of the encyclical. That was fun reading. . . .

Larry A. Carstens
Santiago de Compostela
Spain

A Little Luddite Humor

Many thanks to First Things for giving your readers David Carlin's "For Luddite Humanism" (April). It would have been difficult to digest and sort all the somber brilliance of Daniel Callahan and his respondents on medical ethics in the same issue without Carlin's identification of the players—the GDs, Gradual Dehumanizers; the IDs, the Instant Dehumanizers; and the MLs, the Moral Luddites (though the symposium did lack a true IDer).

David Carlin brought needed humor to the high seriousness of First Things. Please bring him back.

Joseph English
Bronxville, NY

For Polarization

Your March issue contained some quotes of Archbishop Keeler's criticism of the press coverage when the Pope was in Denver ("Journalism and Getting the Story Straight," Public Square). It would be hard not to agree with the remarks the Bishop has made about the faults of the secular press. It seems to me, though, that the Bishop is dodging the real issues that are raised by the press, however biased. . . .

The Archbishop says that "The real 'American Catholic Story' is that the Church in this land grew last year alone by one million members." I have no doubt that the Bishop has statistics to prove this assertion. What bothers me is that the Pope made the point, in one of his instructions, that many people are calling themselves Catholic, but do not have that right. The Holy Father did not seem impressed with mere statistics. . . .

The remark of the Archbishop that most reveals a Pollyanna attitude is this: "We need to help the media to understand that the real 'American Catholic Story' is the story of millions of people who love the Church, who are not polarized over issues. . . ." There is not a thing wrong with being polarized over issues. There are great moral, liturgical, dogmatic, and theological issues that we must be polarized over. If one loves the Church he should be polarized. Catholics are Catholics because they are polarized, or should be, towards the Christian view of life. . . .

Thomas Norton
Dillwyn, VA

Re-Imagining Evil?

If the "RE-imaginers" at the interdenominational conference in Minneapolis last November ("A New Heaven & a New Earth," March) wanted to be original, they failed, alas. Sixty years ago, some similar reimagining was done by academicians who included among their tenets the following:

The living world is the womb

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of the high human mind. The All-Mother gives birth to Knowing, Being, and Mind. The concept of mother-child is, therefore, the correct expression of the God-world secret. We speak of a modern nature religion when we speak of the Mind-child God, who lives in the womb of the All-Mother. The basic religious feelings are Union, Holiness, and Blessedness. On the other hand, the Christian sentiments of Sin, Guilt, and Repentance are not really religious feelings. They are artificially engendered complexes in man.

It's all there: a female deity, the apotheosis of childbirth, no more sin or "folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff."

The theological innovators of 1934 wanted to create a new Earth. They almost succeeded. The above tenets were formulated by Professor Ernst Bergmann, a pioneer in the Nazis' German Faith movement that sought to supplant Christianity.

In their intentions, the radical feminists of Minneapolis are not Nazis. But Kathy Kersten is right: the "wonderful space" they seek to create "where we are truly to be ourselves," without limits imposed by Truth, would approach hell. Did approach hell.

John M. Owen
Postdoctoral Fellow
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA

What They Gave

(for my brother, Larry)

1.
I wanted to talk, just you and me your
girl Linda, blown away: her eyes,
still mirrors. (Stepfather's impotent
rage, falling drunk all over her words,
his gun. And then she's dead.
And the old man? He probably fell too.
Passed out, wetting himself,
under all those fierce stars.)

Next to the garage we sat, talked
in high weeds, streetlight. Tears you had
rubbed away flattened the blond hair high
on the walls of your cheeks. You said
what you could—everything around you
still tangible: the wood that made up
the houses, the buzz in the light overhead.
A cricket, next to you, with its
black lines, incredible hinges.
Wonder and death. Who could make this?
Who would?

2.
Physical affection did not run in our family.
Our parents had to watch from a distance
as the dust of all those summer days, the tears,
gave us a skin.

This is what they gave.

David Craig

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Opinion

Is Choice Still a Choice?

John E. Coons

Last November, California voters defeated "Proposition 174." Had it passed, 174 would have provided scholarships to all school children in an average amount of $2,600 (half the cost of a California public school education). The scholarships were to be usable in participating private schools or in a new form of state school operating with virtually the autonomy of a private school. These new schools in both sectors were to be guaranteed total freedom (within federal law) to determine their own admissions and—in private schools—to charge whatever extra tuition the traffic would bear. For more than a decade opinion surveys had shown (they still do) that subsidizing educational choice—even in religious schools—is a popular idea. Until the campaign got into full swing last fall, the California polls showed strong support for Prop 174; thereafter its popularity rapidly declined. In the November election, the proposal was crushed 70 to 30.

Various plausible explanations are available for what was either an amazing shift—or a colossal misperception—of public attitude. The possible causes are interrelated. The first is an old favorite of political losers: The school establishment was able to outspend the proponents about eight to one; most of its twenty-four million dollars went for an exquisitely deceptive television campaign featuring such phantasmagoria as new private schools run by witches. The campaign was run by no-holds-barred publicists, typified by the young PR hot shot who in the summer of 1993 told me with relish of his firm's plan to portray California's future educators as ranging from religious eccentrics to Nazis. He assured me that he had nothing personal against his intended victims and that school choice was probably a good idea.

Second, the teachers' unions—state and national—carefully cultivated the apprehension of the suburbanites that Prop 174 would deliver hordes of inner-city children to their schools. These middle-class folk—though generally well disposed to family choice and the market—feared that their schools might get even worse. The reality (of which they heard little) is that relatively few inner-city families are interested in suburban schools and fewer still would be willing to endure the burden of time and travel. Nor could most afford it, since the proposal failed to guarantee transportation (a feature well advertised to the inner city).

Third, the media tended to assume that Prop 174 was an ideological caprice of free market extremists hostile to public schools. And they said so. Nothing from the sponsors disabused them, and the actual language of Prop 174 allowed the interpretation that a great deal of money would have to be drawn from the public system, thereby reducing per-pupil spending. Simultaneously it was read to threaten an overall increase of spending to cover children already in private school. The text of 174 was labyrinthine, and the media—as was proper—played its ambiguities both ways.

Fourth, the issues were in fact complex, and the public might have been far from understanding them even after a well-financed campaign in favor of the proposal; when in doubt, voters generally say no to ballot propositions. Fifth, the timing was very bad; economic recession intensifies the tendency for voters to stand pat. Sixth, the proponents very soon fell into faction and scattered their meager resources. One group is now suing another.

Finally, apart from its unintended ambiguities, Prop 174 was not a sound piece of policy; and one suspects that, after all, the people really did understand it. Essentially it was the same device that was presented to the voters of Oregon and Colorado in the two preceding years with identical (and predicted) results. Its most salient flaws can be stated briefly: Although a $2,600 scholarship would fill up the remaining spaces in the existing inner-city parochial schools, the mass of low-income children would have no schools in which to spend their scholarships. As a similar experiment in Milwaukee demonstrates, $2,600 does not start many new schools in the city.

Suburbia is another matter. There the middle-class family could add to the state scholarship whatever tuition would be necessary to initiate new private institutions. That is good and proper, but—unless the aim is educational triage—the inner city is where reform must begin, and in a more substantial way.

Compounding the effects of short supply, Prop 174 guaranteed the absolute freedom of private providers to reject unpromising students. I intend no criticism of existing private schools; long observation and involvement convince me that they are in general more cordial to the hard-to-educate than are the public schools. Nor should private schools be expected to take special education cases of the kind local public schools can typically reject. But considerations both of principle and politics argue that schools operating on public money should make some modest commitment to the common task. Politically, the private

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schools must overcome the defamatory image that has been carefully nourished by teachers' unions, school boards, government administrators, and apologists like the Clintons. But, in any case, Prop 174 came off as morally ambiguous. It not only permitted the private providers to reject less gifted children; they were also permitted to charge whatever tuition would assure that no low-income (or for that matter working-class) families would darken their door.

This question about the criteria of admission is a source of division among friends of family choice. Some of the libertarian proponents of Prop 174—taking their cue from Milton Friedman—still cling to the notion that private providers should get the state's money while making no commitments whatever. In the fall of 1991, they contracted for a public opinion survey on the specific question as to whether an initiative should require participating schools to reserve 15 percent of new admissions for low-income children, if so many were to apply. They directed their pollster to label such a provision a "quota." To their astonishment, a majority of the respondents approved it. And it is a measure of the proponents' devotion to principle that they nonetheless struck this guarantee from the final draft of 174. It is a measure of the political alertness of the drafters of the current proposal for the Oregon state ballot that they have included a 20 percent set-aside for low-income children as a condition of any school's participation. If there is anything certain in the politics of school choice it is that reforms that would shunt all the harder cases to the government sector will be pilloried by the media and rejected by the public.

So, what are the prospects for school choice? The short run will depend upon the so far unimpressive capacity of choiceniks to agree upon moderate proposals. By "moderate" I mean that the following principles must be satisfied.

1. The initiative must neither: (a) increase total public spending more than a modest capped amount (say one percent); nor (b) entail the reduction of per-pupil spending in public schools; nor (c) threaten with substantial change those schools whose families are presently content.

2. It must include a mechanism empowering providers in the *public* sector to deregulate immediately; government-initiated schools must be freed straightaway to operate in the manner of the private sector, if they choose to do so.

3. The proposal must protect private schools from new regulation that could threaten their autonomy in curriculum, hiring, style, management, and choice of facilities; and they must retain absolute control of the great majority of admissions.

4. The proposal must, however, assure that the participating private schools will allow some small share of the hard-to-educate children of the sort typically enrolled today in inner-city religious schools to enroll and give it a fair try.

5. The scholarship for low-income children must be sufficiently large to stimulate formation of new providers without supplementation by tuition.

Satisfaction of these conditions would demonstrate to a receptive public that choice is the hope of the ordinary family.

Paradoxically, the greatest problem for choice in the long run may be the good-hearted attitude of those Americans who simply misunderstand the nature of what our society has called the "public" system. Too few have grasped that these state schools constitute an inward-turning monopoly that—at least in the cities—serves only itself. Largely ineffectual for all income classes, the monopoly goes out of its way to disfavor the working class and the poor who cannot escape its grasp. But to see this demands a great deal of people who generally experience the public school only as a local pathology. They have nothing with which to compare it; they cannot yet imagine how a free alternative could work. Few of their political leaders—at any level—have much incentive to tell them the truth; and even the friends of choice have allowed them to prefer the devil they know.

Until school choice is presented in a form both perspicuous and credible to ordinary families, it cannot count as a realistic policy alternative. There is some reason to hope that such a proposal will appear on the California ballot in 1996. At this point everyone seems to be trying.

JOHN E. COONS *is a professor at Boalt Hall, the School of Law at the University of California, Berkeley.*

The Gift of Christopher Lasch

James Seaton

A balanced assessment of the work of Christopher Lasch will not be possible for some time. For many, Lasch was above all the author of *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), an unrelenting indictment of contemporary society. *National Review*, for example, concluded its obituary notice—one notably generous to a figure identified with the left throughout his career—by characterizing Lasch as one who, "though capable of lighting candles, was best at cursing the darkness."

Those for whom Christopher Lasch provided a model of intellectual integrity must regard such a summing up as misleading at best. Yes, Lasch's life-

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long critique of a liberalism seeking "painless progress toward the celestial city of consumerism" remains unmatched; yes, he was one of the few social critics who questioned the tacit assumption that underlies so much progressive thinking, that "men and women wish only to enjoy life with a minimum of effort."

Lasch's greater significance, however, lies in his slow, painstaking journey to a deeper view of both human beings and reality. One of his favorite terms of praise was "hard-won," and Lasch's own attainment of insights beyond the reach of mainstream liberalism was "hard-won" even by his own high standards. His career reveals the moral and spiritual depth that becomes possible when an intellectual disdains the consolations offered by the intellectuals' view of themselves as morally and mentally superior to the rest of humanity.

In *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (1962) Lasch began the analysis of liberalism from within that he would continue and deepen throughout his career. He noted shrewdly that liberal illusions about the Russian Revolution were based on a theological mistake; the idea, if not the reality, of the Russian Revolution would remain irresistible to Western liberals "as long as they clung to the dream of an earthly paradise from which doubt was forever banished." Lasch would amplify this point in the last book published before his death, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (1991), where he noted that the petty bourgeoisie—the "middle Americans" so glibly denounced by liberal critics—at least "are unlikely to mistake the promised land of progress for the true and only heaven."

At first, however, it was to Marx and Freud that Lasch turned in search of a more profound view of life. In the work that established his reputation as an intellectual, *The New Radicalism in America* (1965), religion appears almost exclusively as a source of obfuscation. Lasch found then that it was "the religious roots of progressive doctrine" that were the source of "its main weakness," which he diagnosed as an anti-intellectual willingness to use education "as a means of social control" rather than a basis for enlightenment. The book held out the hope that "a radical critique of American society" might yet be fashioned by integrating Marxism and psychoanalysis, perhaps along the lines of Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*.

Throughout the seventies Lasch worked through the ideas of Marx and Freud, an effort that culminated in *The Culture of Narcissism*. Already, however, there were hints that he would never rest content with any worldview that these figures and their successors might provide. In *The World of Nations*, a 1973 collection of essays, Lasch emphasized his "antipathy to Whiggish or progressive interpretations of history." In an essay on the Mormons, he resisted the temptation to expatiate on the follies of religious fanaticism and instead pointed out that the assimilation of the Mormons was being "achieved by sacrificing whatever features of their doctrine or ritual were demanding and difficult," specifically "the conception of a secular community organized in accordance with religious principles." Without accepting Mormon theology, Lasch emphasized the more influential error of the mainstream religious liberalism that Mormonism had originally opposed, "the comforting illusion that religion is an affair of the spirit alone having nothing to do with the rest of life."

Haven in a Heartless World (1977) offered a passionate critique of the "enlightened opinion" which ratified "the substitution of medical and psychiatric authority for the authority of parents, priests, and lawgivers." In *The New Radicalism in America*, Lasch had noted the tendency of progressives to identify social control with freedom, but now it was not socialist revolution but the traditional family that seemed to provide the best hope for staving off the "new forms of domination." Lasch discovered a latent strength in the family and its "old-fashioned middle-class morality," noting that the decline of the family meant also "the decline of romantic love" and "the decline of transcendent ideals in general."

The Culture of Narcissism, Lasch's only best-seller, represented an attempt to integrate such insights within a Marxian politics and a Freudian mode of analysis. Most readers, presumably including President Jimmy Carter, noticed only the overwhelming sense of national "malaise" that the book communicated so powerfully and missed Lasch's indictment of "the system of corporate capitalism" and his call for "a socialist revolution." The neglect was understandable, for if Lasch was correct, there seemed to be little any of us could do about anything anyway. Under the culture of narcissism even art and religion, "historically the great emancipators from the prison of the self," had lost their liberating power, and finally even sex had lost its "power to provide an imaginative release."

The book seemed to mark a dead end, but for Lasch himself, surprisingly, it became a turning point. Having reached a nadir of pessimism, Lasch was nevertheless unwilling to surrender to a fashionable postmodernist cynicism. In an exchange over *The Culture of Narcissism*, Lasch announced the direction he had chosen, one that would put him at odds with former allies and invite misunderstanding from would-be friends. He declared that the left had "chosen the wrong side in the cultural warfare between 'middle America' and the educated or half-educated classes, which have absorbed avant garde ideas only to put them at the service of consumer capitalism." Hereafter his critique of the illusions congenital to enlightened opinion would become ever more incisive. Lasch did not slide into bitterness,

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however, since he was now ready to search for truths overlooked or decried by progressive ideologies.

The Minimal Self (1984) made explicit Lasch's recognition that the insights of traditional religion retained their vitality while the moral and intellectual authority of Marx, Freud, and their epigones withered. Rejecting mere psychic "survival" as a meaningful goal, Lasch argued that "Self-affirmation remains a possibility precisely to the degree that an older conception of personality, rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions, has persisted alongside a behavioral or therapeutic conception." He added that it was this form of "self-affirmation" which alone seemed to offer genuine hope for "democratic renewal." While to many opinion-makers the memory of Auschwitz seemed to justify a "survival ethic" in a meaningless world, Lasch argued that "the only lessons Auschwitz has to offer" are "the need for a renewal of religious faith, the need for a collective commitment to decent social conditions." Lasch pointed out that a reading of memoirs from Auschwitz prisoners reveals that, by and large, survivors did not themselves turn to any survivalist ethic; they "found strength in the revealed word of an absolute, objective, and omnipotent creator . . . not in personal 'values' meaningful only to themselves."

The concluding words of *The Minimal Self* summed up the new importance Lasch assigned to religion. Couching his thesis in general terms and carefully refusing to capitalize references to divinity, he refrained, as usual, from displaying his personal emotions, but his words are eloquent nonetheless: "In the history of civilization . . . vindictive gods give way to gods who show mercy as well and uphold the morality of loving your enemy. Such a morality has never achieved anything like general popularity, but it lives on, even in our own enlightened age, as a reminder both of our fallen state and of our surprising capacity for gratitude, remorse, and forgiveness, by means of which we now and then transcend it."

In *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics,* Lasch not only provided a powerful critique of a view of progress whose culminating hope is a "vision of men and women released from outward constraints" but, even more important, sketched the outlines of an alternative tradition. Examining such disparate figures as Jonathan Edwards, Orestes Brownson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle, William James, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King, Lasch searched for a conception of "hope" that could be distinguished from the shallow optimism of progressive thought. In contrast to the liberal view of human beings as consumers, he recalled the "heroic conception of life" articulated, for example, in Orestes Brownson's Catholic radicalism. Lasch noted that Brownson and the early republican tradition shared "a suspicion that life was not worth living unless it was lived with ardor, energy, and devotion." Agreeing that the suspicion was justified, Lasch argued that a truly democratic culture requires a shared commitment not to diversity for its own sake but rather to "a demanding, morally elevating standard of conduct." He noted that "political pressure for a more equitable distribution of wealth can come only from movements fired with religious purpose and a lofty conception of life."

In one of his most impressive chapters, Lasch illuminated the greatness of Martin Luther King, who addressed the nation as a whole but "also spoke the language of his own people, which incorporated their experience of hardship and exploitation yet affirmed the rightness of a world full of unmerited hardship." Like Lincoln, King drew strength from "a popular religious tradition whose mixture of hope and fatalism was quite alien to liberalism." In a separate essay, Lasch attributed "the collapse of the civil rights movement" to the liberal insistence, even among pastors, that racial issues be confronted "with arguments drawn from modern sociology and from the scientific refutation of racial prejudice" rather than confronted on the moral and religious grounds that King had articulated so compellingly.

Perhaps the most provocative passages in *The True and Only Heaven* are those in which Lasch moved beyond his critique of political and even cultural liberalism to recover conceptions of reality familiar to past generations but discarded by progressives. Lasch noted that progressive optimism is easily shaken when things go wrong; "the disposition properly described as hope, trust, or wonder, on the other hand—three names for the same state of heart and mind—asserts the goodness of life in the face of its limits. It cannot be defeated by adversity." The "disposition" Lasch evokes is fostered by ideas shared by the great religious traditions but rejected by enlightened opinion: "The power and majesty of the sovereign creator of life; the inescapability of evil in the form of natural limits on human freedom; the sinfulness of man's rebellion against those limits; the moral value of work, which at once signifies man's submission to necessity and enables him to transcend it. . . ."

Such affirmations are not original, but they offer something better than mere originality: the recovery for us, today, of the insights of the past as the reward for Lasch's persistent engagement with and against the ideologies of the present. The career and the journey of Christopher Lasch remind us that intellectual integrity and reflective independence remain possible even under the sway of postmodernist nihilism. As we mourn the death of Christopher Lasch, we can also be grateful for the candles he lit.

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On Hegemonic Discourse

Robert W. Jenson

It is currently a favorite complaint and/or explanation: a "hegemonic discourse" is repressing someone. Thus, for instance, it is said that "patriarchal" societies practice a hegemonic masculinist discourse, and that this is why when gender-feminists try to say their truth they are driven to such linguistic enormities. Or again, Christians who actually believe the gospel are said to bind the religious impulses of their fellow denominationalists with dogmatically grammared language, which is why when the latter try to express the depths within them these come out seeming so paltry. Et cetera.

A hegemonic discourse, we are told, makes things that ought to be said unsayable; therefore those who nevertheless try to say them find themselves uttering nonsense though they know they have sense to say. The phrase "hegemonic discourse" is well established (in a hegemonic discourse?), and is equally beloved of charlatans and genuine thinkers; in view of the latter, there must be something to it.

But what is a hegemonic discourse? So soon as the question is allowed, its answer is—embarrassingly?—apparent: it is the way those talk who at any given time and place happen to be doing the talking. Perhaps they have come to be or remain in this position by shutting others up, by manipulating them, or by doing something else reprehensible. But it is not apparent that this must always be so. Maybe others just like to hear them.

There is of course the possibility that everyone could be doing the talking, that there would be no outsiders at all. The realization of this possibility is awaited by Jewish or Christian faith as the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is important to notice: nothing would necessarily be different about discourse in itself merely because it had no outsiders. It is just that nobody would complain of hegemony. Even in the Kingdom of Heaven there could still be governing linguistic rules of which someone could complain if, impossibly, there were anyone who wanted to.

If some of us at a time and place short of the Kingdom are not among those doing the talking and are unwillingly in that position, we have two recourses. We can join the going conversation, learning to talk its way. Or we can try to replace the way of the going conversation with the way we would talk if we were doing the talking; such an attempt is known as a revolution. By neither move can we create a discourse that is not hegemonic. Until the Kingdom comes, somebody will still be doing the talking and somebody else will still not be doing the talking. Unless, of course, nobody at all is talking anymore.

All discourse is enabled by grammar, by implicit rules that let us, e.g., put "horse" and "fast"/"slow" together but not "horse" and "vaporous"/"condensed." Grammar is primarily learned and enforced not by direct study—recalling junior high, that would be a lost cause indeed—but by apprenticed practice. Some people know not to say "My horse is condensed," and those who do not, learn it by trying to talk to them. Listen to a clever child with a new word try it out in endless combinations, alert to every response showing which work and which do not—and mourn the irremediable suffering of the child with no practiced talkers to talk to.

Thus a hegemonic discourse is finally just the way those talk from whom we learn to talk at all. Absent a hegemonic discourse and short of the Kingdom, there could only be silence. This could be the pre-linguistic silence of mystic experience. Or it could be the post-linguistic silence of fascist cacophony, in which speech has ceased to be discourse and has become simply one way in which we try to cause one another to behave as we want.

This does not mean that hegemonic discourses are not in fact oppressive, that we can never legitimately complain of a going hegemony and should attempt no revolutions. It is the human condition after the fall: what enables us is also what oppresses us. There are several such complaints I have been myself making for decades. To choose an example that is materially almost irrelevant to this article, I have urged the metaphysically revolutionary proposition, "God has plenty of time. It is we who want to be timeless." And I am indeed oppressed by the fact that folk adamantly presume a semantic rule of the very discourse I am assaulting, that for them the word "God" is assumed beyond question to be equivalent to "timeless entity," so that they "hear me saying" the nonsense, "The timeless one has plenty of time."

So if I can cry, "Down with the hegemony of Hellenic theological discourse, which hinders my saying what must be said," why should not others cry, "Down with the hegemony of patriarchal discourse"? Or "capitalist discourse." Or whatever. And of course there is no reason why not. Those who disapprove of such revolutions can then oppose them.

There is, however, one current cry that transfers to another genus. "Down with the hegemony of hegemonic discourse" is on its face only an especially inept pleonasm. But its actual force is desperate: it must be a demand either for silence or for the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom not being in our achieving, and the silence of real mysticism being not commonly wanted, the demand works out as a plea for fascism's substitution of causation for dis-

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course, for the replacement of politics by verbal manipulation.

Two questions present themselves. In what discourse do we complain of or defend a hegemonic discourse? And what would a non-hegemonic discourse be like? I will take up the second first.

If and when a non-hegemonic discourse comes to pass, perhaps it will prove different simply as discourse, in ways now unspecifiable. Perhaps it will have an altogether new kind of grammar. But this need not happen for there to be a non-hegemonic discourse. The necessary and sufficient condition is simply that those doing the talking do not merely by so doing come to fill the role we now call hegemonic. That is, a non-hegemonic discourse will come to pass when nobody any longer must be taught to talk. In other words, it will come to pass when history is no longer constituted by a succession of generations. A non-hegemonic discourse could therefore only be the discourse of the biblical Eschaton. Karl Marx noted this point, and repackaged it as the doctrine of ideology.

Marx's hypothesis that the biblical expectation of the Kingdom could be separated from biblical faith in God has—lamentably—been tested in a massive historical experiment and has been falsified. We may therefore assert with fully public confidence: there will be a non-hegemonic discourse only if there is the Bible's God and only if and when he achieves his final Kingdom and its discourse. This is of course a bitter pill for most who now complain of hegemonic discourse: there can be non-hegemonic discourse only if there is what they most dread, a real Hegemon. Those who first marshalled the noun on which the adjective depends were fathers of the Church, who used it for God, or an apostle or angel as a guide to God, or the deepest part of the soul as the place where God rules.

Discourse that was not oppressive would be a discourse with two characteristics. It would be the way people talked who were all those who wanted to talk. And all its actual sentences would be true, so that it repelled no other truth there was to say. As St. Thomas observed, such a doctrine could only be that of God and his perfected saints. Do we in this world want to cultivate a less oppressive—though still, of course, hegemonic—discourse? Then we must work at approximating the discourse of the saints in heaven. According to the Bible there is a way to do that: belong to one community with the saints and talk with them, join the people of the Lord (which is English for Adonai which is Hebrew for Hegemon).

And now we can turn also to the first question. How can it be that a hegemonic discourse only hinders what cannot be said within it? How can it be that, in however strangulated a fashion, we do sometimes manage to say what cannot be said in the going conversation? In what discourse do we protest a hegemonic discourse? Or oppose such a protest?

Evidently there must be a meta-hegemonic discourse (take that, fellow neologists!), a discourse that enables both any given ruling discourse and language beyond the latter's sway. If there is God, and if he talks to us and lets us answer, there is just such a discourse. Indeed, vice versa: if there is a transcending discourse, the one sustaining it must simply thereby be God. Precisely the possibility of protesting a human linguistic hegemony, whether wisely or foolishly, is an evidence of God. Those who want no Hegemon must, and regularly do, finally deny the possibility of transcending the going human conversation and despairingly acquiesce in its hegemony.

The reason we are not fully enslaved to the fellow humans from whom we learn to talk is that finally it is not they but God who so talks as to enable talking. There can be rebellion against, or defense of, any given discourse if and only if there is a Word before all human conversation that is the latter's possibility and beginning.

According to the heart of Christian interpretation—the doctrine that God is triune—there is indeed a meta-hegemonic discourse, a Conversation in progress before all created conversations. (This heart of Christian doctrine, one should note, is not so foreign to Judaism as might be supposed.) According to Genesis, in and as the beginning, God says, "Let there be" and whatever is, is. According to John's version of Genesis, in the beginning God's Word is with God so utterly as to be God, and all things come to be by being mentioned in this Word. God speaks his Word, which so completely is his truth as to be like him a person, who then must respond. This conversation, prototypically for any good conversation, has a Spirit that is of one being with the conversants. Thus God is a Conversation.

It is by being called into this Discourse that all who ever talk learn to talk. Creatures talk because God has decided to make room in himself for others to join in the Conversation he himself is. God creates all things by calling them in the third person: "Let there be." But some he not only speaks about but speaks to and asks for response. Just thereby, those creatures themselves come to speak, and so are human.

The one meta-hegemonic Discourse is thus not itself a monologue; no one lays down the first and last grammar, since God himself is not merely one. The meta-hegemonic Discourse is antecedently in itself a true conversation. And moreover it is, in the contingency of the divine choice, a conversation that includes us. Therefore we live, move, and have our being in and over against a discourse that is liberating rather than oppressive. There will be a great discourse—indeed, à la the Book of Revelation, a great liturgy—in which all join with perfect freedom. And

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insofar as we can hope already to speak freely, it is by anticipatory joining in that liturgy.

Therefore the penultimate enterprise of seeking less oppressive linguistic polities is not hopeless. We must only be aware of what a tremendous thing we are then attempting, and of the true possibilities and limits of human enterprise on such lines. My suspicion is that if we achieve such awareness, we will stop worrying about "hegemonic discourse."

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On The Other Hand

The Other Face of Gaia

Peter L. Berger

From a lecture given at the Harvard Divinity School by Aglaia Holt, Professor of Wymyns Studies, California State University at Poco.

There still are those who think that religion is on the decline in our time. It is becoming clearer every day how wrong they are. What is on the decline is the tattered residue of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the churches and synagogues, and the desiccated secularism which is the late offspring of that tradition. This particular god is dying if not yet quite dead. But other, more ancient, gods are alive and stirring.

Above all it is *she* that is on her way, the most ancient of all, the Great Goddess, long believed dead and now filling the sky with the portents of her advent. It is still new, this advent. She was reborn some thirty years ago, appropriately enough in California, where the earth trembles and the mighty fault lines threaten the flimsy cities of modernity. The Romans looked east for the coming of new divinities, to Asia Minor, the *vagina deorum*. We must look west, to the rim of the vast ocean from which the moon was once ripped, the gigantic wound on the surface of our planet that has become the womb from which its salvation is being born.

One discerns the inner meaning of an age by perceiving how originally disparate trends come together in a new, coherent whole. Looking back over the last few decades, one can see more and more clearly how one movement after another served to undermine the structures of alienation on which Western civilization was built. The California renaissance of the Sixties began as a rebellion against sexual repression, the alienation of humankind from the body and its sacred energies. This liberation from the malignant heritage of the Puritans was an inevitable and necessary first step. The sexual revolution was the starting point of all the other revolutions, each one an assault on the alienation, the separateness, which is the core of Western modernity.

Today this core is being attacked from all sides. The multicultural movement, rooted in the rediscovery of African and Asian experience, is in the process of dethroning the Eurocentrism of our culture. Scholarly feminists are deconstructing the phallocracy that is equally central in this culture. The environmentalist movement, in conjunction with New Age spirituality and the rediscovery of the Native American worldview, is assaulting the arrogant domination of nature that has brought the planet to the brink of ecocatastrophe. The egalitarian and anti-individualist impulses, most recently coming together in the communitarian movement, are putting in question the very notion of hierarchy on which all domination rests, including the domination over the earth by the human race.

Special credit in this new configuration must go to the animal rights movement, because it has had the courage to challenge the idea of human supremacy over all other forms of life. The struggle to protect even so frail a being as the spotted owl against the despoilers of the earth shows how far our consciousness has been raised in these matters. But it is not only animals who have rights. So do trees, and flowers, and the multitude of living organisms that inhabit the endangered wetlands. *All* life is sacred and must be protected from the ravages of the species ironically titled Homo sapiens. And so, more recently, there has been the revelation of Gaia, the entire earth as a living entity. The Great Goddess has had many names and this is but the latest.

There has also come about a sharper understanding of who is to blame for all this alienation and arrogance. The work of feminist and eco-sensitive thinkers, in theology and philosophy, has made a decisive contribution here. It is above all the Bible that must be blamed! It is no accident that this book begins with a creation story in which the first human (a male, needless to say) is given domination over the earth and all its nonhuman inhabitants. The aforementioned thinkers have demonstrated, in one case study after another, how the repressive, racist, phallocratic and hierarchical heritage of biblical religion has deformed Western culture. The Christian churches, of course, have been the chief vehicle of this monumental deformation. But one must go back much earlier to find the origins of the process.

One event discloses dramatically what is at issue here: the contest on Mount Carmel between the

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prophet Elijah and the royal chaplains of King Ahab (as reported in the eighteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings). Elijah, faithful to the First Commandment of the Sinaitic code, challenged the legitimacy of Ahab's multicultural clergy, bested them in a competition of magical tricks, and ended up massacring them on the banks of the Kishon (in this finale duly foreshadowing centuries of Judeo-Christian intolerance down to the bonfires of the Inquisition).

Who were these people with whom Elijah struggled? The biblical text describes them as "the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." That table in the palace of Ahab's queen was evidently an early version of an interfaith convention. The Baalim, of course, were the agriculturally oriented divinities of Canaan, close to the earth, worshipped in sexually liberated fertility cults. And Asherah was just one of the many names given to the Great Goddess of the ancient Near East, identical with the Mesopotamian Ishtar, whom the Greeks called Astarte and identified with their own Aphrodite. Translated into modern terms, Elijah's antagonists may be seen as an assembly of eco-theologians and committed feminists. In retrospect, we can only agree with him that the worldview represented by these people was incompatible with the rigid monotheistic faith of Israel.

We must return to Mount Carmel and reopen the contestation. We must take our stance with those early defenders of life against the death-dealing, antinature religion of Elijah. This time around, the Great Goddess will be victorious, for her time has come.

Knowing the climate of opinion here at Harvard Divinity School, I feel confident that most of you will have gone along with me up to this point, even though some of you still hope to modify the Judeo-Christian tradition so as to accommodate the new insights that have resulted from the great cultural upheaval through which we have been passing. I expect that many if not most of you will recoil from what I will have to say now. This is understandable. Nevertheless, I urge you to keep an open mind. If you do so, I think that you will eventually come to understand that the additional argument that I am about to make follows logically from the premises that most of us share.

The spirit of my argument finds its source in one of the great cultural revolutionaries of the modern age. The Marquis de Sade (whom Simone de Beavoir, the noted feminist philosopher, hailed as a kindred spirit) gave the following title to one of his last writings, composed in prison while the French Revolution was well underway: "One more effort, citizens, and you will be true republicans!" In this essay de Sade attacked the basic inequality between those who are sexually attractive and those who are not. To redress this wrong, de Sade urged the revolutionaries to promulgate a law that would make it a duty for every citizen to make himself or herself sexually available to every other citizen.

We too must make one more effort, take one more step, before we can truly overcome the deep illness of our Western culture. We must not only overcome what the animal rights activists have called speciesism. *We must overcome human-ism.* Above all, this means that *we must give up the unnatural idea that the individual matters.*

Western notions about the autonomy and the rights of the individual derive in a straight line from biblical religion. The very notion of the individual, as our culture has established it, presupposes the separation between humankind and nature, and (this came later in history) between the human person and the community, which the prophets of Israel initiated against their religious adversaries. American ideologues in particular have proclaimed the sovereignty of the individual and the sacred character of individual rights. The ludicrousness of these delusions becomes apparent when we begin to restore our unity with nature.

In our essence, we are not individuals. We are small, insignificant parts of the vast, pulsating whole of cosmic life. We become healed as we surrender our delusional individuality to this whole. It is not the individual who is sacred, but the life process as a whole—Gaia, the living earth, and perhaps the entire physical universe (since Gaia may have many sisters on other planets and it is even possible that all the galaxies explode in one infinite orgasm). There is a moral consequence to this insight: The individual matters only insofar as his or her existence furthers the sacred life process, and she or he has no rights other than the right and indeed the obligation to make this contribution.

In this way we must also overcome the quasi-Christian sentimentality that still clings to contemporary imaginings of Gaia. As soon as we look carefully, nature is neither nurturant nor benign. She is immensely indifferent to suffering and immensely profligate in the expenditure of individual existences. Vast numbers of sperms are wasted so that one ovum may be fertilized. Countless weaker animals are sacrificed to feed the few stronger ones. The evolutionary process as a whole wastes thousands of species as it selects the very few who will survive. It is this understanding of nature that we must appropriate. We will then also understand that, in the final analysis, life and death are one and the same, and nothing matters beyond the endless thrusting of the divine energy.

Gaia has another face. It has been revealed most fully in India. It is there given the name of Kali-Durga, consort of Shiva, the goddess who both gives and destroys life. She manifests herself naked, four-armed, her mouth gaping to show bloody fangs. In

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her four hands she holds a noose, a skull-topped staff, a sword, and a severed head. She is dancing on a mountain of corpses. Many people, perhaps even many of you, think they are not yet ready for this vision. But I assure you it is the future to which she calls us; it is the future that we have already embraced.

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The Victorious Ones

They march in like the infantry—
Mrs. Alexander and her women of Circle 9.
Blue bib aprons tied in double bows,
they take position in the
industrial-grey church kitchen.
No time for chatter.
Carrots must be sliced, cheese cubed;
pickle spears placed upon lettuce-laced trays
as only they can do.
Steely-haired all, they know where to find
every paring knife and chopping block. . . .
Men out! And to the novices
with offerings of help: No, thank you.
This is the Lord's work and theirs—
serving others
who would be lost, utterly,
amid these crowd-feeding
pots and percolators.

Too busy, too tired, themselves, to eat,
they stand behind their food—
with hot tongs and slotted spoons,
dishing up yams and green beans
and Captivating Chicken Casserole.
Mrs. Alexander keeps a sharp
eye on the rolls.

Stomachs full, we applaud these women
whose lipstick stays put
while their feet swell in navy kid pumps,
whose silken sleeves are spattered
with grease.
We give thanks to those
who know who they are.

Ashley Mace Havird

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Awakening from Nihilism
The Templeton Prize Address

Michael Novak

This essay is adapted from an address presented by Mr. Novak at Westminster Abbey on May 5, 1994. He is the twenty-fourth recipient of The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

As we draw near the close of the twentieth century, we owe ourselves a reckoning.

This century was history's bloodiest. From this revered and mortally threatened Abbey some fifty years ago, one could hear the screech of falling bombs. At a time they didn't choose, and in a way they didn't foresee, more than a hundred million persons in Europe found their lives brutally taken from them. An earlier Templeton laureate, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, has agreed that, beyond the war dead, 66 million prisoners perished in the Soviet labor camps. Add the scores of millions dead in Asia, Africa, and the other continents since 1900.

Nor is there any guarantee that the twenty-first century will not be bloodier.

And yet the world has drawn four painful lessons from the ashes of our century. First, even under conditions of nihilism, better than cowardice is fidelity to truth. From fidelity to truth, inner liberty is wrested.

Second, the boast of Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler that dictatorship is more vigorous than "decadent democracy" was empty. It led to concentration camps.

Third, the claim that socialism is morally superior to capitalism, and better for the poor, was also empty. It paved the road to serfdom.

Fourth, vulgar relativism, now widely ascendant, undermines the culture of liberty. If it triumphs, free institutions may not survive the twenty-first century.

For three centuries, modernity has been supremely fruitful in its practical discoveries—in, for example, its magnificent institutions of political and economic liberty. But it has been spectacularly wrong in its underlying philosophy of life. An age wrong about God is almost certain to be wrong about man.

History, Hegel once remarked, is a butcher's bench. *Homo homini lupus.* Many sober inquirers, seeing how prodigally in this century the bodies of individuals have been thrown around like sacks of bones, understandably asserted that God is dead.

And yet, in this dark night of a century, a first fundamental lesson was drawn from the bowels of nihilism itself: *Truth matters.* Even for those unsure whether there is a God, a truth is different from a lie. Torturers can twist your mind, even reduce you to a vegetable, but as long as you retain the ability to say "Yes" or "No" as truth alone commands, they cannot own you.

Further, as the prison literature of the twentieth century—a very large literature, alas—abundantly testifies, truth is not simply a pragmatic compromise, although torturers try seductively to present it so. "It is such a little thing," they say. "All you have to do is say 'yes,' sign here, and this will all be over. Then you can forget about it. What harm will come of it? We have been in power for seventy years, we will always be in power. Be reasonable. Accept reality. It is such a little thing. Who will ever know? Just sign and be done with it."

Yet millions have known in such circumstances that their identity as free women and free men was at stake; more exactly, their salvation. Irina Ratushinskaya, Raoul Wallenberg, Andrei Sakharov, Maximilian Kolbe, Vladimir Bukovsky, Vaclav Havel, Anatoly Sharansky, Pavel Bratinka, Tomas Halik, Mihailo Mihailov—let us summon up the witnesses, the endless scroll of honor of our century.

To obey truth is to be free, and in certain extremities nothing is more clear to the tormented mind, nothing more vital to the survival of self-respect, nothing so important to one's sense of remaining a worthy human being—of being no one's cog, part of

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no one's machine, resister to death against the kingdom of lies. In fidelity to truth lies human dignity.

There is nothing recondite in this. Simple people have often seen it more clearly than have the clerisy. This is the plain insight that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn expressed when he wrote in his 1970 Nobel Address that one single truth is more powerful than all the weapons in the world, and that, dark as that hour then seemed in the world, with communism everywhere advancing, truth would prevail against the lie; and that those who clung to truth would overturn tyranny. (He was correct in his prediction. Truth did prevail over arms—we are witnesses to history; it is our obligation to teach this to our children.)

What those learned who suffered in prison in our time—what Dostoevsky learned in prison in the Tsar's time—is that we human beings do not own the truth. Truth is not "merely subjective," not something we make up, or choose, or cut to today's fashions or the morrow's pragmatism—we *obey* the truth. We do not "have" the truth, truth owns us, truth possesses us. Truth is far larger and deeper than we are. Truth leads us where it will. It is not ours for mastering.

And yet, even in prison, truth is a master before whom a free man stands erect. In obeying the evidence of truth, no human being is humiliated—rather, he is in that way alone ennobled. In obeying truth, we find the way of liberty marked out "as a lamp unto our feet." In obeying truth, a man becomes aware of participating in something greater than himself, which measures his inadequacies and weaknesses.

Truth is the light of God within us. For us its humble mode is inquiry, seeking, restlessness. Innermost at the core of us, even as children, is an irrepressible drive to ask questions. That unlimited drive is God's dynamic presence in us, the seed of our dissatisfaction with everything less than the infinite.

The Grand Refusal of the modern age to say "yes" to God is based upon a failure both of intellect and of imagination. Modernity's mistake is to have imagined God as if He were different from truth, alien from ourselves, "out there," like a ghostly object far in space, to serve Whom is to lose our own autonomy. Modernity has imagined God to be a ghostly version of the tyrants we have actually seen in the twentieth century. It took the real tyrants of our time, jackbooted, arrogant, enjoying the torture of innocents, to shatter that false identity. The tyrants may have thought they were like God; it was idiotic to flatter them that God was like them.

Many who resisted the tyrants of our era turned nihilism inside out. In the nothingness they found inner light. Many came to call the light they found there God. The relation some gradually assumed toward this inner light, whose Source, they knew, was not themselves, was that of wordless conversation or communion. They addressed their God in conversation, under the name of Truth. In the twentieth century, prisons and torture chambers have often been better places to encounter God than universities.

Until recently, then, modernity was mistaken in its relation to truth, and thus to God and humankind. But even so modernity has, to its great credit, by grant of Providence, made three great institutional discoveries. Modern thinkers first worked out, as neither the ancients nor the medievals had, the practical principles of the three-fold free society: free in its polity, free in its economy, and free in the realm of conscience and inquiry. The great modern achievements in these matters have been supremely practical: How to make free institutions work at least tolerably well, and better in most ways than earlier regimes.

However, despite these happy practical gains, modernity tore down the only philosophical foundations that can sustain the free society. The Age of Enlightenment was supposed to do away with sectarian bickering, but it did not. If you stay within your own school of thought, the foundations of the free society may seem secure. Peek outside, however, and you will hear raucous voices shouting. The Age of Enlightenment has failed to secure a mode of public moral argument worthy of the institutions it has erected.

Lest we forget: The twentieth century has been not only the bloodiest but also the most ideological of centuries. Ideology is the atheist's substitute for faith, and, lacking faith, our age did not want for warring ideologies. For nine decades of this century, armies not exactly ignorant clashed by night. Beneath the fearful din, two great practical principles of the free society were mortally contested: first, the *political* principle; second, the *economic* principle.

Despite the slogans of the 1930s ("the End of an Era," "the Decline of the West") and despite the boasts of dictators ("In three weeks England will have her neck wrung like a chicken"), decadent democracies proved they had the will, the audacity, and the stamina to defeat the principle of dictatorship. They defeated it so decisively that today hardly a dictator anywhere—too many, unfortunately, remain—dares to argue that dictatorship is an ideal form of government. Most are left to argue limply that, in the particular case of their own countries, dictatorship is expedient. They lie.

Even for desperately poor people, the principles of democracy (the rule of law, limited government, checks and balances) are better than dictatorship. Only thus can people enjoy the zone of civil liberty necessary to ensure their dignity and self-command. Democracy is the world's first great practical lesson of our time, learned at fearful cost.

The second great practical lesson of our century is the futility of socialism as an *economic* principle. For 150 years, the battle over fundamental economic

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principles was conducted asymmetrically. Hundreds of books detailed the wonders of socialism as an ideology, passionately dissected the flaws of capitalist practice, and boastfully mapped out the coming transition from capitalism to socialism. Not one single book existed—when the time finally came—to map out the one necessary transition, from socialism to capitalism. I doubt whether ever in history were so many intellectuals wrong on a matter to which they themselves assigned highest moment, all the while thinking of themselves as "scientific" and disinterested. The story of how this happened must one day be recounted.

As Pope John Paul II pointed out in *Centesimus Annus*, this story is connected to the intellectual's devaluation of the human person. No system that devalues the initiative and creativity of every woman and every man, made in the image of their Creator, is fit for human habitation. On the first day that the flag of Russia snapped against the blue sky over the city hall of St. Petersburg, where for seven decades the Red flag had flown, a Russian artist told me: "The next time you want to try an experiment like socialism, try it out on animals first—men it hurts too much."

Indeed, once the Iron Curtain was joyfully torn down, and the Great Lie thoroughly unmasked, it became clear that in the heartland of "real existing socialism" the poor were living in Third World conditions; that a large majority of the population was in misery; that both the will to work and economic creativity had been suffocated; that economic intelligence had been blinded by the absurd necessity to set arbitrarily the prices of some tens of millions of commodities and services; that the omnivorous State had almost wholly swallowed civil society; that the society of "comrades" had in fact driven an untold number of people into the most thoroughly privatized, untrusting, and alienated inner isolation on earth; that this Culture of the Lie had been hated by scores of millions; and that the soils of vast stretches of the land and the waters of rivers and lakes had been despoiled.

Three great lessons have been learned from our century, then, even if the cost of learning them was fearful beyond measure. First, *truth matters*. Second, for all its manifest faults, even absurdities, democracy is better for the protection of individuals and minorities than dictatorship. Third, for all its deficiencies, even gaping inadequacies, capitalism is better for the poor than either of its two great rivals, socialism and the traditional Third World economy. Just watch in which direction the poor of the world invariably migrate. The poor—of whom my family in living memory was one—know better than the intellectuals. They seek opportunity and liberty. They seek systems that allow them to be economically creative, as God made them to be.

From these three lessons, one might derive reasons for hope: Quite possibly—if along that great plain that runs like an arrow eastward from Germany through Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Russian steppes, the new experiments in democracy and capitalism succeed—the twenty-first century could be the most prosperous and free in the history of the world. Perhaps China, too, if it becomes a democracy under the rule of law as it is already becoming capitalist, will bring to its more than one billion citizens unprecedented liberty. And throughout Latin America, there is a chance that the fertile soil of liberty will yield new fruits of education, creative energy, and prosperity for all.

Indeed, the twenty-first century could be the single most creative century in history, bringing virtually all the peoples of the world under the cool and healthful shade of liberty. It could be lovely.

Far likelier, however, is the prospect that the twenty-first century will be like the twentieth: tormented, sanguinary, barbarous. For there is still, alas, a fourth lesson.

During the twentieth century, the free society was fighting for its life. The urgent need to secure the free polity and the free economy blinded most to the *cultural* peril into which liberty has rapidly been falling.

Many sophisticated people love to say that they are cynical, that ours is a cynical age. They flatter themselves: They do not believe nothing; they believe anything. Ours is not an age of unbelief. It is an age of arrogant gullibility. Think how many actually believed the romances of fascism and communism. Think how many, today, believe in Global Warming; think how many believe in a coming Ice Age—and think how many believe in both! One thing our intellectual betters never lack is passionate belief.

One principle that today's intellectuals most passionately disseminate is vulgar relativism, "nihilism with a happy face." For them, it is certain that there is no truth, only opinion: *my* opinion, *your* opinion. They abandon the defense of intellect. There being no purchase of intellect upon reality, nothing else is left but preference, and will is everything. They retreat to the romance of will.

But this is to give to Mussolini and Hitler, posthumously and casually, what they could not vindicate by the most willful force of arms. It is to miss the first great lesson rescued from the ashes of World War II: Those who surrender the domain of intellect make straight the road of fascism. Totalitarianism, as Mussolini defined it, is *la feroce volantá*. It is the will-to-power, unchecked by any regard for truth. To surrender the claims of truth upon humans is to surrender Earth to thugs. It is to make a mockery of those who endured agonies for truth at the hands of torturers.

Vulgar relativism is an invisible gas, odorless, deadly, that is now polluting every free society on

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earth. It is a gas that attacks the central nervous system of moral striving. The most perilous threat to the free society today is, therefore, neither political nor economic. It is the poisonous, corrupting culture of relativism.

Freedom cannot grow—it cannot even survive—in every atmosphere or clime. In the wearying journey of human history, free societies have been astonishingly rare. The ecology of liberty is more fragile than the biosphere of Earth. Freedom needs clean and healthful habits, sound families, common decencies, and the unafraid respect of one human for another. Freedom needs entire rainforests of little acts of virtue, tangled loyalties, fierce loves, undying commitments. Freedom needs particular institutions and these, in turn, need peoples of particular habits of the heart.

Consider this. There are two types of liberty: one precritical, emotive, whimsical, proper to children; the other critical, sober, deliberate, responsible, proper to adults. Alexis de Tocqueville called attention to this alternative early in *Democracy in America*, and at Cambridge Lord Acton put it this way: Liberty is not the freedom to do what you wish; it is the freedom to do what you ought. Human beings are the only creatures on earth that do not blindly obey the laws of their nature, by instinct, but are free to choose to obey them with a loving will. Only humans enjoy the liberty to do—or not to do—what we ought to do.

It is this second kind of liberty—critical, adult liberty—that lies at the living core of the free society. It is the liberty of self-command, a mastery over one's own passions, bigotry, ignorance, and self-deceit. It is the liberty of self-government in one's own personal life. For how, James Madison once asked, can a people incapable of self-government in private life prove capable of it in public? If they cannot practice self-government over their private passions, how will they practice it over the institutions of the Republic?

There cannot be a free society among citizens who habitually lie, who malinger, who cheat, who do not meet their responsibilities, who cannot be counted on, who shirk difficulties, who flout the law—or who prefer to live as serfs or slaves, content in their dependency, so long as they are fed and entertained.

Freedom requires the exercise of conscience; it requires the practice of those virtues that, as Winston Churchill noted in his wartime speeches to the Commons, have long been practiced in these Isles: dutiful stout arms, ready hearts, courage, courtesy, ingenuity, respect for individual choice, a patient regard for hearing evidence on both sides of the story.

During the past hundred years, the question for those who loved liberty was whether, relying on the virtues of our peoples, we could survive powerful assaults from without (as, in the Battle of Britain, this city nobly did). During the next hundred years, the question for those who love liberty is whether we can survive the most insidious and duplicitous attacks from within, from those who undermine the virtues of our people, doing in advance the work of the Father of Lies. "There is no such thing as truth," they teach even the little ones. "Truth is bondage. Believe what seems right to you. There are as many truths as there are individuals. Follow your feelings. Do as you please. Get in touch with yourself. Do what feels comfortable." Those who speak in this way prepare the jails of the twenty-first century. They do the work of tyrants.

You are, no doubt, familiar with the objection to this warning. Its central argument goes like this: to accept the idea of moral truth is to accept authoritarian control. But between moral relativism and political control there is a third alternative, well known to the common sense of the English-speaking peoples. It is called self-control. We do not want a government that coerces the free consciences of individuals; on the contrary, we want self-governing individuals to restrain immoral government. We want *self*-government, *self*-command, *self*-control.

If a people composed of 100 million citizens is guarded by 100 million inner policemen—that is, by 100 million self-governing consciences—then the number of policemen on its streets may be few. For a society without inner policemen, on the other hand, there aren't enough policemen in the world to make society civil. Self-control is not authoritarianism but rather the alternative to it.

"The Revolution," Charles Péguy once wrote, "is moral, or not at all." This is also the law for the free society. It will deepen its moral culture—or it will die. As human lungs need air, so does liberty need virtue. The deepest and most vital struggles of the twenty-first century will be cultural arguments over the sorts of habits necessary to the preservation of liberty. What are the habits we must teach our young? Which are the habits we must encourage in ourselves, and which discourage? To allow liberty to survive—and, more than that, to make it worth all the blood and tears expended to achieve it—how do we need to live?

With the ample wealth produced by a free economy, with private liberties bestowed abundantly by free polities, are we not now ashamed of the culture we have wrought, its shocking crimes, its loss of virtue, its loss of courtesy, the decline of common decency? Can all the sufferings of our ancestors on behalf of liberty have been endured for this—that we might be as we now are?

Nihilism builds no cities. Great cultures are built by vaulting aspiration—by the Eros of truth and love and justice and realism that flung into the sky such arches as this Abbey's.

We must learn again how to teach the virtues of the noble Greeks and Romans, the commandments God

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entrusted to the Hebrews, and the virtues that Jesus introduced into the world—even into secular consciences—such as gentleness, kindness, compassion, and the equality of all in our Father's love. We must celebrate again the heroes, great and humble, who have for centuries exemplified the virtues proper to our individual peoples. We must learn again how to speak of virtue, character, and nobility of soul.

Liberty itself requires unprecedented virtues, rarely seen in simpler and more simply led societies. Special virtues are needed by self-governing peoples: calm, deliberate, dispassionate reflection; careful, responsible, consequence-accepting choice. In self-government, citizens are sovereigns, and must learn to exercise the virtues of sovereigns.

The free economy, too, demands more virtues than socialist or traditional economies: It demands active persons, self-starters, women and men of enterprise and risk. It requires the willingness to sacrifice present pleasures for rewards that will be enjoyed primarily by future generations. It requires vision, discovery, invention. Its dynamism is human creativity endowed in us by our Creator, Who made us in His image.

And so, too, the pluralist society calls for higher levels of civility, tolerance, and reasoned public argument than citizens in simpler times ever needed.

To maintain free societies in any of their three parts—economic, political, or cultural—is a constant struggle. Of these three, the cultural struggle, long neglected, is the one on whose outcome the fate of free societies in the twenty-first century will most depend. We will have to learn, once again, how to think about such matters, and how to argue about them publicly, with civility, and also with the moral seriousness of those who know that the survival of liberty depends upon the outcome. The free society is moral, or not at all.

No one ever promised us that free societies will endure forever. Indeed, a cold view of history shows that submission to tyranny is the more frequent condition of the human race, and that free societies have been few in number and not often long-lived. Free societies such as our own, which have arisen rather late in the long evolution of the human race, may pass across the darkness of time like splendid little comets, burn into ashes, disappear.

Yet nothing in the entire universe, vast as it is, is as beautiful as the human person. The human person alone is shaped to the image of God. This God loves humans with a love most powerful. It is this God who draws us, erect and free, toward Himself, this God Who, in Dante's words, is "the Love that moves the sun and all the stars." FT

Doubletalk

(Psalm 12)

Turn where?
Hear
Shark hearts, the fast
Talking, two-faced,
The beasts boast:
Truth
Trips and
Falls on
My lips:
If I say
It is so
It is so.

If God's word be hot
Coal (my good thoughts
The embers)
Lord,
Stoke up a bonfire.
Those lip-lickers lurk
In the shadows
And eye me.

Laurance Wieder

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The Family and the Constitution

David Wagner

The family occupies a precarious position in the liberal democracies of today. It still exists; it sometime flourishes; mainstream public policy experts are rediscovering its importance—but at the same time, it is under ideological assault, sometimes in the name of individualism, sometimes in the name of an ill-defined "community" whose agent is, naturally, the state. In the face of this assault, defenders of the family find that there is, in fact, an imperfect fit between the individualism that underlies contemporary moral discussion, and the quintessentially interpersonal nature of the family.

We did not get into this predicament by accident. Mary Ann Glendon, in *The Transformation of Family Law*, identifies the ideological wellspring of the present assault on the family:

> To the French revolutionaries, the old feudal statuses, the Church, the guilds, and even some aspects of family organization were seen both as oppressive to individuals and as threats to the nation-state. . . . [T]he revolutionary leaders aimed at suppression of the *corps intermédiares* of the old regime under the slogan "There are no rights except those of individuals and the State."

While we in the United States pride ourselves on having avoided in our own revolution the ideological and sanguinary excess of France's, it may well be that the view of family described by Professor Glendon crept into American practice, wearing at first the reassuring mask of elite charity.

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I

In the late nineteenth century, industrialization and the emergence of unprecedented concentrations of the poor in America's cities led to new forms of state activity. One that particularly concerns the family is the rise of what Philip Rieff first called the "therapeutic state." This is the name given to what happens when the casework method of social philanthropy is linked to the coercive power of government.

To put it more concretely: when a rich person, or his agent, shows up at a poor person's front door and offers assistance that is supposedly tailored to that poor person's particular needs, the poor person is free to choose a wide variety of responses, ranging from grateful acceptance to slamming the door. But when the agent at the door represents not a private party but the state, backed up by legislation and enforcement power, the poor person's range of options is extremely limited, and his dignity and autonomy are violated. The state will proceed to "help" him in the way that it, not he, thinks best.

This was precisely the approach that upper-class do-gooders in New York and in other major cities took to the problems of the new urban poor. The objects of casework philanthropy in the poor neighborhoods of America's late-nineteenth-century cities were very often parents, whose ability to raise their own children was being called into question by the "friendly visitors" from uptown. Even granting the Park Avenue ladies the best of intentions, the movement as a whole was a massive attack on the family among the poor. As Chesterton might have put it, those who professed concern about "poor families" were in fact disturbed not so much by the fact that many families are poor as by the fact that many of the poor have families.

Hunter College political scientist Andrew Polsky, in his 1991 book *The Rise of the Therapeutic State*,

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describes the theory of that state by contrasting it with private-sector therapy that is freely sought and freely terminable.

> By contrast, public therapeutic intervention aimed at marginal citizens proceeds from the assumption that they cannot govern their own lives. The state therefore seeks to "normalize" them—an odd term, one that jars the ear, as well it should when we consider what the effort is all about. Lower-class clients do not seem to require merely a bit of support, like their middle-class counterparts, but instead wholesale personal and family reconstruction. Intervention sets out to foster new behaviors, instill another set of mores, and cultivate a different outlook toward self and family. By bringing about profound changes at the most intimate levels of human existence, the state aims to integrate marginal citizens into the social mainstream. Further, resistance on their part will not be tolerated. The state has the legal tools to impose client status upon marginal citizens and the coercive instruments to compel them to remain in that exposed position.

Polsky traces the origins of the therapeutic state to the fears of the middle and upper classes of the burgeoning poor population in their midst, and to the alliances formed between the "charitable" organizations and the law enforcement system—alliances that allowed the organizations to take on state-like powers. One of these alliances that flourished in New York City in the 1880s was the Children's Aid Society, which spawned a number of other groups known as "SPCCs," or Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. According to Polsky, the founder of the Children's Aid Society, one Charles Loring Brace, explicitly viewed parents' authority over children as something to be eliminated. Other such societies were even bolder than Brace's. As Polsky tells it:

> In fact, the New York chapter in 1881 gained the power to make arrests, while other SPCCs routinely called upon the police. Statutes permitted the societies to be appointed as guardian in neglect cases and to be given immediate custody of very young children. Courts looked to SPCC agents for recommendations and usually followed their advice, which often was to separate a child from his or her family. It was no wonder, then, that the poor called the SPCC "the Cruelty," and dreaded the appearance of its representative on their doorstep.

It might be hoped that traditional Anglo-American notions of due process would protect families in this situation, and would serve as a filter to separate actual cases of abuse or neglect of children from cases where the family was the victim of a false report, or where there was merely a difference of opinion as to child-rearing technique between the poor family and its unsolicited benefactors. However, then as now, those protections are by and large applicable only in the criminal justice system; they protect parents and families, if, but only if, formal criminal charges are brought. The genius of the therapeutic state as a means of social control, and as a means of substituting the state for the family, is that it functions separately from the criminal justice system, and is subject to few, if any, of the procedural rules that bind the police and the criminal courts.

Today, the American child protection system functions not through the assignment of state power to private agencies, but through agencies that are openly governmental—though, as just noted, not bound by the rules of criminal procedure. The system expanded considerably once the federal government began pouring money into it under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 (CAPTA). Like conventional law enforcement, this system is addressed to a genuine social need; at the same time, again like conventional law enforcement, it can become a threat to protected liberties when not kept within constitutional limits. But, quite unlike conventional law enforcement, it has thus far been allowed to operate virtually free of constitutional restraint.

Abuses by child protection systems are receiving increased public attention. Family issues analyst Dana Mack, researching a book on modern parenting, stumbled across the issue, unexpectedly but repeatedly. Hundreds of parents, writes Mrs. Mack in the *Washington Post* (January 30, 1994),

> spontaneously report that they, or close friends and relatives, have been visited by child protection agencies for acts no more noxious than disciplining a wayward child or seeking medical help for a playground injury. The stories they tell—of investigations, removal of children, and irresponsible therapeutic intervention—are the unknown side of the child abuse issue in America.

Three weeks after Mrs. Mack's *Post* article, the therapeutic state struck back with a letter from David S. Liederman, executive director of the Child Welfare League of America. Mr. Liederman clearly does not buy the "innocent parent" theory. He scolds Mrs. Mack for

> champion[ing] parents who, when confronted with the traumatic effects of their behavior, quite expectedly minimize their responsibility and the impact of their actions on their children. . . . [T]hose who are concerned with the safety and well-being of the growing numbers

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> of abused children in this country do not find appeals to parents' rights at the expense of their children persuasive.

One might ask how, in a democracy founded on notions of freedom and self-government, micromanagement of family life comes to depend not on families themselves, nor on a democratic vote, but on what the Child Welfare League and the elite for which it speaks "find persuasive."

Child protection reform may be a coming political issue, but it is not yet clear what direction reform will come from. On the one hand, horror stories involving false accusations and erroneous breakups of families continue to pile up. On the other hand, contrary horror stories—where the state *refrained* from seizing the child, and the child was later killed or maimed by the parent—also receive a great deal of publicity, and tend to provoke calls for still more intrusive legislation. There is widespread dissatisfaction with our child abuse system—which fails not only by needlessly traumatizing innocent families, but also by neglecting to intervene in cases where children are actually in serious danger (often cases that pose some physical danger to the caseworker). But while nearly everyone agrees the present system needs reform, we are only beginning to achieve a consensus that parents' rights, family autonomy, and the rule of law should play a role in that reform.

II

Limiting the family's autonomy and bringing it under the supervision of the state seemed to be very much the trend in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it was not without challengers. Eventually a countertrend found its way into the Supreme Court's constitutional case law, via the cases of *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925).

In these cases, the threats to the autonomy of the family came from efforts to supplant parents as decisionmakers with regard to their children's education. In *Meyer*, the state had banned the teaching of modern foreign languages in any school prior to the ninth grade. In *Pierce*, the state had mandated that all children attend the government-operated public schools.

Both of these statutes were struck down. The constitutional text that the Court invoked was the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment: "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law. . . ." The Court has nearly always read this clause as having some *substantive* as well as *procedural* content; that is, the clause is read as barring some types of government action outright, no matter how large a majority votes for such action, and no matter how fair the legislative procedures were.

In *Meyer* and *Pierce*, the court held that the privacy and autonomy of the family, and the rights of parents to direct the upbringing of their children, are part of the "liberty" protected by the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause. Consequently, laws prohibiting private education, or (as in *Meyer*) prohibiting parentally desired alternatives in public or private schools, are held to be outside the range of laws that legislative majorities are allowed to enact. The key language for the *Pierce* decision is as follows:

> The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.

Meyer and *Pierce* struck important blows for the sanctity of private life, at just the time that the administrative state with all its regulatory tentacles was beginning to stir. But these cases have had a strange interpretive history. Their utility as an engine for parents' or guardians' rights was abruptly capped in *Prince v. Massachusetts* (1944). Here, the Court resonantly declared:

> It is cardinal with us that the custody, care, and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder. *Pierce, supra.* And it is in recognition of this that these decisions have respected the private realm of family life which the state cannot enter.

Nonetheless, the court upheld the application of the child labor laws to a child distributing religious literature with his aunt, who was also his legal guardian. Though the "cardinal with us" dictum has often been quoted in later decisions (and even more often in the briefs of pro-family attorneys), and though one certainly need not be "anti-family" in order to support child labor laws, *Prince* nonetheless put an end to a period in which the Court could be relied on to protect the family, as an institution, against the state.

Then in the 1960s *Pierce* and *Meyer* began to be cited as authority for legal propositions that, to say the least, stray rather far from traditional, natural law roots of those decisions. To take the most startling examples, they have been cited in support of a constitutional right to use contraceptives and a constitutional right to have an abortion. Furthermore, a constitutional right to marry, which was itself based in part on the *Meyer-Pierce* family privacy doctrine,

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turned into a constitutional right to obtain a divorce.

What happened, in a nutshell, was that the right of parents to direct the upbringing of their children was transformed into a general right of family privacy, which in turn was transformed into a right of *personal* privacy and autonomy in sexual matters. Though they did not use the word, *Meyer* and *Pierce* gave protection to privacy: in fact, they are the foundational cases for the much discussed "constitutional right of privacy." The Supreme Court in the early 1920s seems to have implicitly understood privacy to be relational rather than personal, oriented toward protecting the special personal relationships that civil society relies on, rather than toward disencumbering the sovereign self.

As elite notions of the content of privacy changed, so did the legal import of the *Meyer-Pierce* doctrine. Cases that protect parents' rights to direct their children's education are accepted as authority for cases that protect a mother's right to kill her child, and very few people seem to think this is strange.

Nothing could more clearly illustrate the dangers inherent in the substantive approach to the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause: as conservative scholars such as Judge Robert Bork have pointed out, substantive due process is an engraved invitation to judges to read their own policy preferences into the Constitution, bypassing the legislative process and the will of the majority. Those of us who are attached to *Meyer* and *Pierce*, but horrified by *Roe v. Wade*, feel very keenly the force of what we know Judge Bork would say to us: he who lives by substantive due process, dies by substantive due process.

Occasionally, at unpredictable intervals, the *Meyer-Pierce* doctrine actually gets put to its originally intended use. A sterling example is the decision last December of a state appeals court in New York, in a case called *Alfonso v. Fernandez*, holding that the New York City Board of Education violated the constitutional rights of parents when it implemented a condom distribution program in the schools without either an opt-out clause or a provision to require the consent of each participating student's parents or guardians. Said the court:

> The petitioners enjoy a well-recognized liberty interest in rearing and educating their children in accord with their own views. Intrusion into the relationship between parent and child requires a showing of an overriding necessity. The minority [among the judges] points to the fact that student participation in the condom availability component of the expanded HIV/AIDs program is wholly voluntary, devoid of any penalty for nonparticipation, and that parents are still free to provide guidance on this and related (or unrelated) issues. However, these factors do not constitute proof that the petitioners are not being forced to surrender a parenting right—specifically, to influence and guide the sexual activity of their children without State interference.

I have omitted the internal cites from this passage, but I would point out that they include *Meyer* and *Pierce*. In an irony that illustrates the protean nature of the privacy cases, *Roe v. Wade* is also cited.

Alfonso was a significant victory for parents; yet they continue to suffer an attrition of their rights.

III

We have focused on this phenomenon in the child protection system; now it is time to look at the governmental education system. Here we find that the public education system, too, is becoming an increasingly suspect institution from the point of view of family rights. A partial list of the trends that have been either implemented or proposed in our public schools would include: explicit sex education, beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school (implemented in most public schools); school-based health clinics, which would provide contraceptive advice and devices, and abortion referrals (implemented in some schools, advanced in recent federal legislation); lengthening the school day and/or the school year (proposed in some states); lowering the age of mandatory schooling (proposed in some states).

What we may be witnessing is a convergence of education policy and welfare policy, with the schools as all-purpose social service centers. In the "school of the future" proposed by some theories, it is hard to see what role is left for the parental home to play in a child's life, except that of providing meals and beds. In fact, even meals are slipping away from the domain of the home, as more and more schools provide breakfast as well as lunch (sometimes with the support of parents who cannot—or choose not to—provide breakfast at home). The logical end point, of course, is the system of ancient Sparta, with children living in government barracks. The main difference would be that the Spartan state did not seize the children at quite so early an age.

Given the role that public schools may well play in the grand strategy of the therapeutic state, it seems natural to suppose that in due course *Meyer* and *Pierce* themselves would come under attack, first in the law reviews, and later in litigation, especially after the Clinton Administration has seeded the federal courts with judges sympathetic to the therapeutic agenda.

In fact, the law review phase of the attack has already begun. In the summer of 1992 the law review at the William and Mary Law School published an article entitled "'Who Owns the Child?' *Meyer* and *Pierce* and the Child as Property," by Barbara Bennett Woodhouse, professor of law at the University of

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Pennsylvania.

Professor Woodhouse acknowledges that the parents' rights cases have generally been received with approval by the liberal mainstream of legal academia because they are seen as protecting privacy, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. However, her goal is to reveal what she sees as the hidden dark side of those cases. In her words:

> I will argue that they were animated, as well, by another set of values—a conservative attachment to the patriarchal family, to a class-stratified society, and to a parent's private property rights in his children and their labor. Along with protecting religious liberty and intellectual freedom, *Meyer* and *Pierce* constitutionalized a narrow, tradition-bound vision of the child as essentially private property. This vision continues to distort our family law and national family policy, so that we fail as lawmakers to respect children and fail as a nation to recognize and legitimate all American children as our own.

Professor Woodhouse goes on to put some historical flesh on her core argument—her breathless discovery that in deciding the parents' rights cases the way they did, the Justices committed conservatism. The alternative vision that she offers is one in which public schools—backed up by new laws designed to achieve "exit reduction," i.e., to make it harder for parents to choose alternatives to the public schools—function as the advance guard of communal child-rearing, and the "narrow" and "tradition-bound" influence of parents is minimized.

While acknowledging the nativism and religious bigotry that lay behind the Oregon school law that was struck down in *Pierce*, Professor Woodhouse nonetheless endorses that law as a "recipe for radical change." "Progressive reforms," she writes, "such as children's welfare bureaus, juvenile courts, and, of course, the expansion of public schools, pushed at the borders of the domestic realm." She quotes approvingly from another author endorsing the child protection system as "an attack on patriarchal power." Children, she believes, should be seen as "having a direct relationship with government." We should view "the relation of child, parent, and state as a triangular arrangement instituted and regulated by the state for the protection of the child," and we should welcome "the Progressive vision of the child as public resource and public ward, entitled both to make claims upon the community and to be claimed by the community."

This is surely the ultimate corruption of the rhetoric of rights—when the right being asserted is a right "to be claimed by the community"; a right of a child to be subjected to the coercive ministrations of the therapeutic state, with or without the child's own consent, never mind that of his parents.

At the same time, we should receive Woodhouse's theories with a certain sense of déjà vu as we compare them to the views of the French revolutionaries described earlier by Mary Ann Glendon, namely, that the family is to be attacked precisely *because* it is a barrier between the individual and the state, and a competitor with the state for the individual's loyalty.

IV

While the nation's law schools and social service bureaucracies harbor many who would find Professor Woodhouse's views congenial, many encouraging countertrends are also discernible. For one thing, there is an emerging consensus among policymakers, stretching from the moderate left all the way to the solid right, that the two-parent family is beneficial to children, and that American public policy has ignored this fact, leading to a wide variety of social pathologies. Furthermore, a lobbying organization called "Of the People" has recently been launched for the purpose of defending parents' rights, especially in education. Also, the practice of teaching one's children at home is on the increase. (In what some consider a delightful irony, this supposedly backward practice is being helped along by the computer revolution.)

The goal of "Of the People" is to enact amendments to the state constitutions, and eventually to the federal Constitution, protecting parents' rights. This would be a valuable reform, not only because of its direct effects, but also because it would get around the flaw that some conservative scholars have pointed to in *Meyer* and *Pierce*. Much as those decisions correctly applied the natural law, there is no getting around the fact that they represent a reading of that law into the positive law of the Constitution without any specific warrant in the Constitution's text. One could mount a defense against this critique, arguing that the concept of the family as a zone of privacy and of partial legal immunity is "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty." Evidence from legal history that the family has nearly always been so regarded could be buttressed by social science evidence of what happens when the family ceases to function. For all that, however, it is always better to have constitutional text to rely on than the shift in policy preferences of the judicial branch of government.

Insofar as liberalism rests on a certain reductionist individualism, and tends to disparage actors other than the individual and the state, the family is an anomalous institution under any regime that rests, as ours does, on liberal premises. Our public philosophy lacks a category into which the family fits easily.

But at the same time, a liberal republic cannot survive without the civic virtues that are learned in the family. As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio*: "[I]t is from the family that citizens come

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to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself." Many American policy makers who don't know the Pope from popcorn could endorse that statement.

The particular way in which the family fulfills this indispensable social function is that it fosters human relationships of a type that are not easily found in the wider society, and generally are not found there at all if they are not first learned in the family. As the Pope puts it:

> The relationships between members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving." By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter, and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service, and deep solidarity.

Persons of a utopian frame of mind dream about creating such relationships throughout society as a whole, bypassing the family. In confronting this error, we find that the debate goes to premises about human nature. The liberal philosophers undervalued the family because they thought that team spirit, respect for others, elementary charity in dealing with fellow human beings, and so on were simply innate—part of human nature, which (perhaps in reaction against Calvin's doctrine of total depravity) they assumed to be good. Catholic teaching has always affirmed (most recently in the opening section of *Veritatis Splendor*) that human nature, though darkened by sin, still contains a yearning toward the good. But the overwhelming weight of the evidence is that this yearning must grow into actuality in the fertile soil of the family.

Therefore, the survival of all that is best in liberal institutions—respect for the individual human person, commitment to freedom and the rule of law—depends on liberalism being revised and amended so as to accommodate, at the level of principle, the mediating institutions of society, and in particular the family. The opposite path—that of absolutizing only the individual and the state—leads by a short road to the therapeutic state, and to the demise of respect for human dignity as an operative principle in political life. FT

At Sea

At night Walter shudders without light
Puts his grip on life in glass with his teeth
And hopes his eyes don't roll under the bed
Laughing in the lonely dust, hiding in his shoes.
Walter shivers and pockets his dreams,
Thinks *maybe the whalers will come pick me up*
Folds margarine into bread for tomorrow's
Garden lunch in the grass, sings deafly *O*
white waves and brown girls alive alive o
Marks the day off one more thank god until
Sunday when *Mr. Connor with his boat*
Comes up the porch to make me alive again
And on the ocean my legs are thickmuscled
Without blue popping veins and
The rough hair is golden and the sun is mine
Walter dips his bread in grease for dinner
white and brittle like an eggshell now
but i slept on oily wood, morning steamy
with the carcasses of monsters o i lived
Walter huddles under his sheet and rocks
Seeing the greentops of mountains at the foot
Of the bed, off starboard; and forgetting the dark
He squints a tan and a smile
And watches the sun without blinking . . .
here we go boyos the islands of steamy green

Brian Doyle

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Blacks and Jews Entangled

Edward S. Shapiro

In her 1991 autobiography, *Deborah, Golda, and Me*, Letty Cottin Pogrebin argued that black-Jewish relationships rested on a common history of oppression. "Both blacks and Jews have known Egypt," she wrote. "Jews have known it as certain death (the killing of the firstborn, then the ovens and gas chambers). Blacks have known it as death and terror by bondage." Paul Berman agreed. "It was the past that made the blacks and the Jews almost the same," he wrote in the February 28, 1994 issue of the *New Yorker*, "and the past has the singular inconvenience of never going away." Jewish attitudes toward blacks have developed within the context of this faith in a common history and destiny. Of the many pieties of American Jewry, few have been accepted so readily and widely at face value or have been so influential as the easy assumption that blacks and Jews share vital interests arising out of what the rabbi-historian Arthur Hertzberg termed the "comradeship of excluded peoples."

The dismay of American Jews regarding the current status of black-Jewish relations arises from the presumption that blacks and Jews should stand side by side through thick and thin. "The truth is that Jews do feel different vis-à-vis the black community," Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, recently stated. "There is a history, there is a kinship, and it goes beyond the rhetoric. Look, there's never going to be a crisis in Irish-black relations or Italian-black relations, because they have no relations. But we do."

Jews have supposed that they, more than any other group, could and did empathize with the plight of blacks, and that blacks recognized this. Jewish newspapers early in the twentieth century compared the black movement out of the South to the exodus from Egypt, noted that both blacks and Jews lived in ghettos, and described anti-black riots in the South as pogroms. Even European Jews voiced compassion for the American black. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was translated into both Yiddish and Hebrew. In his 1902 book *Old New Land*, Theodore Herzl wrote:

> There is still one other question arising out of the disaster of the nations which remains unsolved to this day, and whose profound tragedy only a Jew can comprehend. This is the African question. . . . I am not ashamed to say, though I may expose myself to ridicule in saying so, that once I have witnessed the redemption of the Jews, my people, I wish also to assist in the redemption of the Africans.

Among Jewish leaders, if not the Jewish man-in-the-street, it became an article of faith that the fates of blacks and Jews were intertwined. Jews were propelled into the civil rights movement by the belief that Jews and blacks shared the same agenda. Joel and Arthur Spingarn helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Jack Greenberg succeeded Thurgood Marshall as head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the ADL were in the forefront in the campaign against racial prejudice. The financial contributions of Jews were crucial in the work of the NAACP, the Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and other civil rights organizations. More than half of the whites who went to Mississippi in 1964 to challenge Jim Crow were Jews, and about half of the civil rights attorneys in the South during the 1960s were Jews. No white ethnic group voted more readily for

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blacks than Jews. This was true in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, in Chicago and New York. Tom Bradley, Harold Washington, and David Dinkins would not have been elected the mayors of Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City had Jews voted the same as Italians, Poles, and the Irish.

Jews have been far more interested in blacks than blacks have been interested in Jews. George Gershwin wrote *Porgy and Bess*, while Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson spent much of their stage careers in blackface. In academia there is not one black scholar, apart from Julius Lester, a convert to Judaism, whose major field of interest is Jewish studies. By contrast, many of the most prominent authorities on black history and black sociology have been Jews. One thinks immediately of Melville J. Herskovits (*The Myth of the Negro Past*), Frank Tannenbaum (*Slave and Citizen*), and Charles Silberman (*Crisis in Black and White*), among others. The field of black history in America is studded with such names as Herbert Aptheker, Ira Berlin, Philip Foner, Herbert Gutman, Lawrence W. Levine, Leon F. Litwack, Gilbert Osofsky, George Rawick, and Seth M. Scheiner. Robert W. Fogel, the cowinner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Economics, coauthored the most controversial economic analysis of slavery, *Time on the Cross*, and Stanley Elkins wrote *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, the most debated study of the impact of slavery on blacks.

The historian Peter Novick in his 1988 volume, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, noted a difference in the way that gentile and Jewish historians have approached black history. While white historians who wrote of white attitudes and behavior toward blacks—George Frederickson, Winthrop Jordan, C. Vann Woodward—were usually gentiles, those white historians who wrote of blacks as subjects were generally Jews. Jews seemingly were better able to write about blacks from the black point of view. Thus Herbert Gutman wrote a mammoth history of the black family and Lawrence Levine wrote an outstanding book on Afro-American folk culture. Nell Painter, a contemporary black historian, claimed that while most white historians wrote from a white perspective, historians such as Levine and Gutman "are able to think about history in what I'd call 'black' ways."

Jewish spokesmen emphasized that this affinity of Jews toward blacks stemmed not only from idealism but also from self-interest. Jews would benefit the more America moved toward a society of merit in which religious, ethnic, and racial barriers were unimportant. One year before the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation in the 1954 Brown decision, the Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council declared, "In a still imperfect society, Jews, together with many other groups, suffer from inequalities of opportunity and other forms of discrimination." Jewish leaders stressed the similarities rather than the differences between the Jewish and black experience in America. Both groups, they asserted, were powerless and victims of persecution. Both included in their ranks martyrs to American intolerance, Leo Frank in the case of Jews and Emmett Till in the case of blacks. The murder of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi in 1964 strengthened the presumption that the fates of blacks and Jews were intertwined.

This presumption has continued to resonate among American Jews. One curious manifestation of this was the Public Broadcasting System documentary film *Liberators: Fighting on Two Fronts in World War II*. This film and an accompanying book that appeared simultaneously described the role of black soldiers in liberating Jews from the Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps in April 1945. The film opened on November 9, 1992, the fifty-fourth anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center with Jesse Jackson and other luminaries in attendance. One month later it was screened at the Apollo Theater in Harlem under the sponsorship of a group calling itself the Liberators Commemoration Committee. The screening was followed by a reception attended by black leaders, black veterans of World War II, and Holocaust survivors.

Liberators could not have appeared at a more fortuitous time for New York City politicians and black and Jewish leaders. Mayor Dinkins hoped that it would lessen tensions between blacks and Jews that had been exacerbated by the 1991 riot in Crown Heights and the refusal in October 1992 of a Brooklyn jury to convict Lemrick Nelson of the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum. Dinkins had been elected in 1989 as the city's first black mayor, and he had emphasized during the election campaign that he could best heal the city's ethnic and racial divisions. Dinkins' hope for reelection depended on support among Jewish voters, and *Liberators*, with its premise that Jews and blacks shared a common agenda, was grist for his political mill. The New York City Board of Education planned to distribute copies of the documentary to all of the city's public junior and senior high schools, and Jewish philanthropists competed for the privilege of funding the operation. They hoped that the film could help stem the tide of increasing black anti-Semitism and repair the badly frayed black-Jewish liberal coalition.

Liberators received an Academy Award nomination for best documentary even after doubts had been raised by black World War II veterans, Holocaust survivors, and Holocaust historians regarding the film's veracity. It soon became clear that black soldiers had never liberated Dachau and Buchenwald, although they had been in the vicinity. Jeffrey Goldberg, the New York bureau chief for the *Forward*, a Jewish English language weekly, blew the whistle on *Libera-*

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tors. In an essay titled "The Exaggerators," which appeared in the February 8, 1993 issue of the *New Republic*, Goldberg quoted the denials of both black soldiers and survivors that blacks had liberated Dachau and Buchenwald. The American Jewish Committee issued a fifteen-page report which concluded that *Liberators* contained "serious factual flaws well beyond what can be written off as 'artistic license.'"

The black veterans were particularly angry regarding the liberties that had been taken with the truth. "I first went to Buchenwald in 1991 with PBS," one black soldier who appeared in the film told Goldberg. The black soldiers had had an enviable record of service in Europe in 1944 and 1945, and they did not want this record sullied by fantasies which, once discredited, could bring into question their wartime performance. E. G. McConnell, one of these soldiers, said, "We had been stripped of our history in our slavery, and I didn't want to come up with anything that could tarnish our record. But apparently some other people didn't mind a few lies."

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the controversy surrounding *Liberators* was not the deceit practiced by Nina Rosenblum, the film's Jewish cocreator, but her continuing refusal to recant even after the movie's misrepresentations had been exposed and the film and videotape had been withdrawn from circulation. She described as racists those whites who would deprive the black units of credit for liberating Dachau and Buchenwald. This she argued even though the black veterans themselves had been the first to raise doubts about the film. Rosenblum in fact described McConnell as "severely brain-damaged" due to being hit in the head with shrapnel during the war. The black veterans were not the only blacks who objected to the film. Blacks who had been involved in making the film soon realized that their artistic integrity had been compromised for the sake of Rosenblum's political and social agenda.

Rosenblum was not the only Jew unwilling to allow the minor point of historical accuracy to detract from the laudable effort to cement black-Jewish relations. If the film was not factually true, they seemed to be saying, so much the worse for truth. Peggy Tishman, one of the cohosts for the Apollo showing, asked rhetorically, "Why would anybody want to exploit the idea that this is a fraud? What we're trying to do is make New York a better place for you and me to live." The truth of the film was subsidiary to its role in reviving the black-Jewish alliance. For Jews on the left, *Liberators* was a disaster not because it was a fraud but because it encouraged those elements within the Jewish community who were skeptical of the black-Jewish alliance.

Letty Pogrebin, writing in the radical Jewish magazine *Tikkun*, feared that the controversy engendered by the film played into the hands of those political forces who sought to capitalize on black-Jewish hostility. For her, the dispute mandated a search for truth "at a level deeper than facts." "The film presents us with a problem of ethical slippage and well-intentioned embellishment," she wrote, but "not a hoax." "Truth must be defended, yes; but so must the liberal vision of Black advancement and the struggle for Black-Jewish harmony."

It is precisely because Jews have presumed that blacks and Jews have common interests that they are so disappointed by the reluctance of Jesse Jackson and other black leaders to strongly condemn the anti-Semitic rantings of Louis Farrakhan and his ilk. This disappointment stems not only from the belief that blacks have not shown the proper gratitude for all that Jews have done for them. More important is the fact that black anti-Semitism throws doubt on an important element of the identity of American Jewish liberals and radicals—the presumption that blacks and Jews comprise a community of the oppressed and that Jews are never acting more true to their religious and ethnic heritage than when they are working side by side with blacks to create a society free of racial and religious prejudice. If anything, this belief of Jews in their special relationship with blacks encourages anti-Semitism. As Arch Puddington has argued ("Black Anti-Semitism and How it Grows," *Commentary*, April 1994), anti-Semites such as Farrakhan are encouraged in their anti-Semitism "in the knowledge that Jews, unlike other whites, will react not simply with anger, but with wounded innocence and appeals for 'dialogue' and 'healing.' Abandoning the fiction of the special relationship might thus have the paradoxical effect of contributing to a reduction of racial tensions."

Black anti-Semitism, however, is simply incomprehensible to Jews who would like to believe that their own history of affliction, culminating in the Holocaust, has made them incapable of racism. This ignores the sociological and historical context within which black-Jewish relations have evolved. A curious effort along these lines was the editorial "Victims and Victimizers" that appeared in the March-April 1994 issue of *Tikkun*. It argued that the color of people's skins was determined not by pigmentation but by political correctness.

> [W]ho gets labeled "white" and who gets labeled "persons of color" derives not from the color of one's skin . . . but from the degree to which one has been a victim of Western colonialist oppression. By that measure, Jews have been the greatest victim of Western societies throughout the past two thousand years and must certainly be understood to be one of the "peoples of color." Our literature was systematically excluded from the academic canon and so

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deserves to be part of the multicultural corpus. And our history ought to be studied as a prime example of oppression.

For Jews on the left an entente with blacks was necessary in order to define their sense of self. This entente vindicated Jewish liberalism and encouraged a Jewish identity free of religious obscurantism. "We are all forced to confront . . . the question of what is a Jew and what does this all mean," Ellen Willis, a Jewish radical, said in 1982. "And to me the status of Jews as outsiders and as persecuted outsiders is the core of what Judaism and Jewishness is all about." It is this Jewish need for close cooperation between blacks and Jews that accounts for their strong response to the bluster of Khallid Abdul Muhammad. Catholics have every right to feel equally aggrieved, since Muhammad called the Pope a "cracker." But most Catholics have taken his comments with a pound of salt, perhaps because they don't expect much better.

Jews have continued to call for the maintenance of the black-Jewish alliance despite the socioeconomic differences between the two groups. Leonard Fein, the founder of *Moment* magazine, has been among the most eloquent spokesman for this position. In his 1988 book *Where Are We? The Inner Life of America's Jews,* Fein admitted that American Jews were no longer among the oppressed. Nevertheless, Jews should continue to identify with blacks because of "our continuing need to see ourselves among the miserable—or, at least, the still-threatened." The involvement of Jews in the civil rights movement, Fein concluded, "has helped preserve our sense of ourselves as still, and in spite of all the successes we've known, among the oppressed, hence also among the decent, the just, the virtuous." Those familiar with the history of anti-Semitism in Europe, the Middle East, and even the United States would hesitate before conflating, as does Fein, being oppressed with being decent, just, and virtuous.

Even a cursory examination of the history of black-Jewish relations in the United States reveals that they were never as warm as Pogrebin and Fein would have us believe, nor are they today as frigid as alarmists claim. If support for blacks is an ineluctable result of Jewish values, then one would expect that the most Jewish of American Jews—the Orthodox of Brooklyn—would be the most sympathetic toward blacks. The exact opposite, however, is true. Secure in their Jewish identity, they do not require close relations with blacks to define their Jewish identity. Their Jewishness rests on more substantial grounds.

One does not have to be Orthodox, however, to be wary of blacks. Norman Podhoretz's 1963 essay in *Commentary,* "My Negro Problem—and Ours," reveals how wide was the cultural gulf between immigrant Jews and their children who resided in the solidly Jewish neighborhood of Brownsville in Brooklyn and the blacks in adjacent neighborhoods. Podhoretz and his friends were simultaneously repulsed by and attracted to the superior athleticism and sexuality of the blacks, an attitude also reflected in Norman Mailer's famous essay "The White Negro."

If the most Jewish of Jews are the least receptive to blacks, Jews most alienated from Jewish culture and religion have been the most supportive of black demands. It is difficult to draw any connection between the fact that the parents of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were Jews and the fact that their children risked and ultimately lost their lives working in behalf of blacks in Mississippi. Goodman and Schwerner evidenced little attachment in their daily lives to things Jewish. Goodman's parents were radicals, and his father was president of the board of directors of the radical New York City radio station WBAI. Schwerner professed to be an atheist. It was fitting that, just as they had lived their lives remote from Jewish concerns, so neither Goodman or Schwerner had Jewish funerals. What was true of Goodman and Schwerner was also true of many prominent Jews in the civil rights movement. The Spingarns were hardly ardent Jews. William Chafe's recent biography of Allard Lowenstein shows the extent to which Lowenstein was embarrassed by his Jewish background, as evidenced by his decision to attend the University of North Carolina rather than a northern university where there would be a sizable Jewish enrollment. Jack Greenberg did not participate in Jewish political or social affairs, and he seldom set foot in a synagogue. Indeed, it would seem that for Greenberg and Lowenstein, as well as for Howard Zinn, William Kuntsler, and others, an involvement in black causes was a surrogate identity that helped fill the vacuum in their lives stemming from their estrangement from things Jewish.

The myth of black-Jewish identity also mistook the nature of black-Jewish relations and the attitude of blacks toward Jews. It is true that in a variety of ways blacks ever since the time of slavery have modeled their lives on the Jewish experience. As indicated by black spirituals such as "Go Down, Moses," blacks drew parallels between their own situation in the South and that of the Jews in Egypt. Just as Jews escaped from slavery and, in the process, inflicted punishment on their taskmasters, so blacks anticipated flight from slavery and the chastisement of the South. The popularity of "Zion" in the names of black churches shows the extent to which the experience of the exodus resonated among blacks. Black nationalists used the Zionist movement as a model for their own back-to-Africa movement. Finally, blacks used the example of the upward social and economic mobility and bourgeois values of Jews as a model for their own people. For groups such as the Black Jews of Harlem this admiration for Jews led to syncretic

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religious cults containing Jewish elements.

Despite, however, what affinity they might have felt to Jews, blacks believed that there was still a vast racial gulf separating the two groups. No matter how much Jews did for blacks, in black eyes Jews were whites with all the privileges accruing to those with white skins. For blacks, the great fault line in America was not between the oppressors and the oppressed, including Jews, but between those with white skins and those with black skins. The rapid decline of American anti-Semitism after 1945 combined with the nation's continuing pervasive racism was proof to blacks, if they needed any such proof, that the condition of American Jews bore little resemblance to that of blacks.

Even during the first two decades after World War II—the supposed "golden age" of black-Jewish relations—James Baldwin, Kenneth Clark, and other blacks warned liberal Jews that their image of a close black-Jewish affinity was a fiction of their imagination, and that candor and realism were now required. As Baldwin noted in a famous statement, "Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew." Whenever the black had to pay rent to a Jewish apartment house owner, or shopped at a Jewish-owned store, or was taught by a Jewish school teacher, or was supervised by a Jewish social worker, or was paid by a Jewish employer, the fact of black subservience to Jews was driven home. The title of one of Baldwin's essays was revealing: "Blacks are Anti-Semitic because They're Anti-white."

The constant advice to blacks to look to the Jewish experience as a model exacerbated the problem. That advice assumed that if Jews could make it in American society then presumably so could blacks; but this assumption ignored the crucial fact that Jews were white. Furthermore, the fact of Jewish social and economic advance was painful to blacks in the face of their own less rapid progress. It was as if Jewish success was a constant insult, drawing continual attention to their own inadequacies and failures. One could hardly think of a more effective way to increase anti-Semitism among blacks than to encourage blacks to emulate Jews and to harp continually on the disparity between black and Jewish economic and social development. If Jews and blacks were really oppressed brothers, how could one account for the disparity in their social and economic conditions?

One can only imagine the impact on blacks of Eric Hoffer's comparison of blacks and Jews. The example of Jews, Hoffer wrote,

> shows what persistent striving and a passion for education can do . . . even in the teeth of discrimination. This is a fact which the Negro vehemently rejects. It sticks in his gullet. . . . The Jew impairs the authenticity of the Negro's grievances and alibis. He threatens the Negro's most precious possession: the freedom to fail.

From this perspective, the success of the Jew was a continual contradiction of the cult of victimization fostered by black spokesmen.

Blacks had a far more realistic attitude of the black-Jewish connection than did Jews, and they were not as concerned as Jews by the unraveling of the black-Jewish alliance in the 1960s and 1970s. Jews needed blacks to authenticate their image of themselves as liberals, but blacks did not need Jews to authenticate their image of themselves as blacks. They merely had to look in the mirror. "Jews interested in rebuilding coalitions," Julius Lester said, "had to get to know blacks better, had to get to know them as people instead of as liberal icons."

Blacks also realized that they were hardly the equal of Jews, and that relations between the two groups reflected this disparity in economic and social status. As much as Jews might have done for blacks, the relationship was essentially one of paternalism. A paradigm of this association was the one between Jack Benny and Rochester on the popular radio and television show of the 1940s and 1950s. As close and warm as the dealings between the two men might be portrayed, there was never any mistaking the fact that Benny was the boss and Rochester the servant.

Letty Pogrebin's dismay concerning the debate over *Liberators* derived from her fear that it could prevent a refashioning of the traditional relationship between the two groups. The furor over the film's historical accuracy, she claimed, had obscured the "deeper" truth of the film, namely, that in the past blacks had helped Jews just as Jews had helped blacks. The opponents of the film, in her view, hoped to obliterate the memory of this reciprocity. "Any such reshuffling of the power balance between our two peoples," she said, "disturbs the well-burnished narrative that for decades has reflected the Jewish self-image in warm, flattering tones."

Blacks had resented Jews not because they did not do enough for them but because they did too much. This gave rise to the joke about the man who was shocked to find himself attacked by blacks. "I haven't done anything *for* them," he responded. Harold Cruse's 1967 book, *The Crisis of the Black Intellectual*, was a revelation for its Jewish readers, indicating as it did the extent to which blacks resented Jewish involvement in black affairs. The pervasive anti-Semitism of *The Crisis of the Black Intellectual* stemmed from Cruse's bitterness over the fact that the black drive for self-determination had been deflected by Jewish radicals into causes, such as communism, that were of little relevance to black nationalism.

For decades sensitive observers warned Jews that black-Jewish relations were not what they presumed. In 1964, Rabbi Richard C. Hertz discussed the

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"Rising Tide of Negro-Jewish Tensions" in the black magazine *Ebony*, and two years later the sociologist Dennis Wrong prophesied that "Negro anti-Semitism is not a passing phenomenon." This prediction seemingly has come to pass. Recent polls have revealed that 63 percent of New York City's blacks believe Jews to have too much influence in the city and that blacks are twice as likely to hold anti-Semitic views as other Americans. Gary E. Rubin of the American Jewish Committee has raised serious doubts about the methodology of these polls, and he insists that they overestimate the extent of overall American anti-Semitism. Still, there seems little question that anti-Semitism is more widespread among blacks than whites. American blacks are the only major American ethnic group that has leaders who are clearly anti-Semitic.

Black anti-Semitism seems to have repealed the traditional sociological laws of anti-Semitism. Whereas for whites anti-Semitism is more prevalent among those older, less affluent, less educated, and more religious, among blacks the exact opposite is true. Within the black community there is a positive correlation between youth, schooling, income, and lack of religiosity on the one hand and anti-Semitism on the other. Yet are these results so surprising? Is it really so strange that upwardly mobile blacks would see Jews as part of an undifferentiated mass of whites bent on limiting their advancement? Is it so odd that blacks, after contrasting their economic and social status with that of Jews (or Asians), would hold ambivalent, frustrated, and resentful attitudes toward them? Nevertheless, Jews continue to assume that black anti-Semitism is irrational and transitory. Since blacks and Jews have supposedly been close in times past, black anti-Semitism appears incongruous. Hence Gary Marx's 1967 book, *Protest and Prejudice*, which discounted the presence of black anti-Semitism.

Some Jews on the left would prefer to explain away black anti-Semitism because its existence casts doubt on the myth of black-Jewish comradeship. Thus one participant in a roundtable on "Beyond Crown Heights," published in the January-February 1993 issue of *Tikkun*, asserted, "It's no surprise that we might expect a problem with anti-Semitism after twelve years of Reagan and Bush in which social inequalities have grown." Jews were forced to resort to such bizarre arguments because they consistently misunderstood the history of black-Jewish relations and the relative status of the two communities. Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon's *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions* (1992) exemplifies another attempt to hold on to the black-Jewish alliance. This study of the transformation of the Jewish neighborhood of Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan in Boston into a black slum blamed the hostility of blacks and Jews on unscrupulous bankers, realtors, and politicians, who presumably were only too happy to pit the two groups against each other.

The problems between Jews and blacks, however, go much deeper. American Jews, whatever their problems with prejudice, never experienced anything remotely resembling the enslavement, discrimination, and racism encountered by blacks, while blacks, whatever their gains in status, never experienced the economic and social prosperity of Jews. Blacks and Jews derived different lessons from American history. "The Jewish travail occurred across the sea and America rescued him from the house of bondage," Baldwin wrote in 1967. "But America *is* the house of bondage for the Negro, and no country can rescue him." Their own experience convinced Jews that America was an open society in which education and merit would eventually win out. Hence their firm opposition to affirmative action. History, however, suggested to blacks that American society was irredeemably stacked against them and that something more than the merit principle was necessary if the legacy of three and a half centuries of racism was to be overcome.

On every possible social and economic index—and for whatever reasons—blacks have lagged far behind Jews. Jews, who comprise less than 3 percent of the American population, made up over 25 percent of the names on the most recent *Forbes* magazine list of the four hundred richest Americans. By contrast, there was only one black on the list, the entertainer Bill Cosby, even though 12 percent of Americans are black. Blacks are still waiting for one of their number to be selected to head an elite American university, while Jews have already served as presidents of Princeton, Dartmouth, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania. Blacks have also lagged behind Jews in national politics. There are ten Jewish United States Senators and thirty-three members of the House of Representatives. Jews are overrepresented in the Senate by a factor of four and in the House by a factor of three. Although blacks comprise roughly 10 percent of the House of Representatives, there is only one black Senator—Carol Mosely Braun of Illinois.

While Jews constitute an economic and social elite group within contemporary America, a significant minority of blacks comprise what sociologists call the "underclass." The disparities between Jews and blacks regarding crime, family breakdown, drug addiction, alcoholism, and educational achievements are well known. There is nothing in the American Jewish experience similar to what exists today in the inner city and what the sociologist Oscar Lewis called "the culture of poverty." Jewish criminality, such as that found on the Lower East Side of New York and in Brownsville, Brooklyn back in the 1920s and 1930s, was largely a one-generation phenomenon, as was the Jewish working class. Jewish mem-

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bership in the American labor union movement is concentrated in the white collar unions of teachers, government employees, and social workers. While the major problem facing America's Jews today is maintaining Jewish identity in the midst of affluence, acculturation, and declining anti-Semitism, the major problems facing most blacks are the more immediate ones of economic survival, family breakdown, and continuing racial prejudice. If the comradeship of Jews and blacks as victims was not a mirage in times past, it certainly is one today.

Black-Jewish relations can never be on a sound footing as long as Jewish leaders remain wedded to romantic notions regarding the links between the two groups. The fact is that on a whole host of issues the interests of Jews and blacks diverge, and there is nothing unusual or surprising about this. It is demeaning to both blacks and Jews to argue that each must reflexively support the other's agenda in order to avoid antagonisms. As Michael Meyers, a black leader in New York City, recently asserted, Jews should face "the tough realities":

> It's true that Jews and Blacks have been allies, but we've also been rivals. To many Jews racial quotas are anathema, for many nonwhites affirmative action must be distinguished from exclusionary quotas. We have rivalry about housing. . . . We have disagreements about how and where there are double standards in the criminal justice system.

Meyers could also have added that Jews and blacks have disagreed as well over Jesse Jackson, Israel, and multiculturalism.

Two centuries ago George Washington in his Farewell Address laid down the standards by which the United States should conduct itself with other nations. Here he warned American citizens not to take sides in European conflicts engendered by the French Revolution.

> In the execution of such a plan nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations and passionate attachments for others should be excluded, and that in place of them just and amicable feelings toward all should be cultivated. The nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred or an habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest. . . . Sympathy for the favorite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists, . . . gives to ambitious, corrupted, or deluded citizens (who devote themselves to the favorite nation) facility to betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country without odium, sometimes even with popularity. . . . I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs that honesty is always the best policy.

Washington's advice—above all that honesty is the best policy—is equally applicable to relations between blacks and Jews. FT

Old Habits

You'd wonder now where all those saints have gone,
Those cowling round our calamitous days,
Broadest-backed for the narrowing of hope—
The widest shoulders to lean worlds upon;
All frantic, fretted, our unholy frays
That haled them, incensed, off the walls to cope.

Fine, coarse, familiar habits, soutaned, veiled,
Surpliced, sandaled, paled, visioned, you know how—
Are we undone—now are the champions fled ?
O that those soaring Josephs up the nave,
Those sudden Gabriels might blaze the now
Of need—those Anthonys might find their bread !

Now, how it sounds we're talking in thin air
Or to ourselves—as if they weren't all there !

Tom P. MacGloin

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The Prudence of John Henry Newman

M. D. Aeschliman

On January 22, 1991, the Roman phase of an investigatory process into the character and merits of John Henry Newman (1801-1890)—begun formally in 1958 in Birmingham, England—was completed with the decree by Pope John Paul II that Newman "had practiced the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity towards God and his neighbor," as well as "the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude . . . to a heroic degree." Whether Newman will ever be made a saint, however, is an open question, and perhaps somewhat unlikely: he was neither a miracle-worker nor a martyr.

The Pope's language has a distinctly archaic sound in our deconstructionist atmosphere, suffused with irony about *all* normative moral language. We live in a Nietzschean time "after virtue" in which, a century after the onset of Nietzsche's madness, his skeptical "genealogy of morals" has finally penetrated both the thought and the behavior of the educated lay world. Classic normative assertions of virtue and value along with the concomitant distinctions between power and authority, objectivity and subjectivity, reason and passion, the ethical and the aesthetic, human and animal, even heterosexual and homosexual, are less and less frequently and confidently made, being widely seen as atavistic or "logocentric" illusions or screens or tools for self or group interest. Natural law thinking is not so much dead as unintelligible in a time when the apparently rapidly changing scientific conceptualizations of nature seem to exhaust the range of meanings of the very word "natural." Since the 1960s, the attack on authority has been carried on by the acclamation of democratized media—television, radio, films, rock music, glossy magazines, and pulp literature—which so profitably debauch the public. The varieties of liberalism—from left radical to right libertarian—quarrel over the various stretches of contemporary educational, social, and economic terrain, but few would doubt that traditional moral language, ideas, institutions, and habits are under unprecedented attack.

Works about Newman spanning several decades now—including those of Basil Willey, J. M. Cameron, Terence Kenny, Ian Ker, and perhaps most recently Robert Pattison, in *The Great Dissent: John Henry Newman and the Liberal Heresy* (1991)—are all agreed in seeing him as a dogged and thorough critic of the faith in an inevitable, collective human progress, which is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the liberal, secular-humanist, or Whig interpretation of history. "Newman's view of history," Willey wrote in 1949, was not, "like that of most of his contemporaries—progressive; he did not view it as a linear forward movement towards light and truth." Newman, wrote Kenny in 1957, "was violently opposed to any notion of automatic moral progress, achieved almost by passage of time and without enormous personal effort. He was completely at odds with what he took to be the spirit of the times." Cameron argued in 1974 that "The Whig interpretation of English [and by extension, Western] history has not often been challenged, and the neo-Marxian interpretations of our own day are for the most part sophisticated versions of the Whig interpretation"—of which, he argued, Newman was a root-and-branch opponent. To Pattison, a liberal himself, "the only critic in the English-speaking world who approaches Newman's thorough rejection of the modern spirit is T. S. Eliot"; and he goes on to assert that Newman's "great dissent" is "arguably the most searching rebuke available to liberalism's cosmic pretensions, and it stands as an unanswered challenge to liberalism's most cherished principles."

As early as 1832 Newman himself wrote in a letter

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that "The country seems to me to be in a dream, being drugged with this fallacious notion of its superiority to other countries and other times." In his prescient critique of optimistic nineteenth-century progressivism, which was to be so catastrophically disproved after the summer of 1914, Newman was one of the few major Western intellectuals of his time to see how delusory and destructive a faith it was, and how fraught with those future ill consequences. Aside from the popes, only a few other figures, such as Jakob Burckhardt and Dostoevsky, saw the issues as clearly as Newman.

In this sense Newman, usually seen as a believer in an age of growing skepticism, might more revealingly be seen as a skeptic in an age of growing belief—belief in the idea of the progress of mankind as a whole. He is a skeptic about the credulous faith that H. R. Trevor-Roper has called "the unwarranted assumption that man only needs freedom from ancient restraints in order to realize his inherent perfection." Whatever Newman's later problems with ecclesiastical intrigue and authoritarianism, throughout a long life he remained remarkably consistent in his mistrust of the flatteries of liberalism, whether philosophical, political, or religious. "They are Liberals," he wrote of some opponents in an 1831 letter, "and in saying this I conceive I am saying almost as bad of them as can be said of anyone," and he took a satirical pleasure in quoting the "sturdy moralist" Samuel Johnson's statement that "the first Whig was the devil," who seduced, by flattering, human nature. In his "Biglietto Speech" given in 1879 upon being made a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII, Newman asserted that "For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of liberalism in religion," which "is an error overspreading, as a snare, the whole earth." Of progressives and their bromides he had written in 1852: "They can give no better guarantee for the philosophical truth of their principles than their popularity at the moment, and their happy conformity in ethical character to the age which admires them." The fierce energy of amoral human willfulness had been historically opposed by Jewish prophets and judges, Christian martyrs and bishops, and even by Roman moralists and administrators at their best, but it was a perennial factor in human behavior, one that could be mitigated, channeled, or sublimated, but never wholly destroyed unless human existence, with its potential for true freedom and dignity, were itself to be destroyed.

Newman saw very early on that the natural law, the belief in an "objective moral order," was organically and inextricably linked to Judeo-Christian theism, that "if there is no God, everything is permitted," in the famous formulation of his contemporary Dostoevsky. The nominalist, antinomian reliance on "private judgment," as alluring as it is contradictory, is satirized by Newman in his 1848 novel *Loss and Gain*, in the character of Mr. Batts and the "British and Foreign Truth Society," whose two leading dogmas are: "1. It is uncertain whether Truth exists. 2. It is certain that it cannot be found." (Among the Society's "patrons" are Cicero, Peter Abelard, and Benjamin Franklin.)

Yet for all of Newman's dogged criticism of liberalism, he remains probably the greatest and most eloquent of all spokesmen for liberal education. Modern thinking on university education, J. M. Cameron observed thirty years ago, is no more than a series of footnotes to Newman's 1852 *The Idea of a University*, his classic exposition of the nature, values, virtues—and limitations—of a liberal arts education. Even some of Newman's great secularizing and liberalizing contemporaries saw in his educational and cultural vision the authoritative antidote to the excesses of their age.

Newman was fearful of both the relativism and the will to power of the anarchic individualism that was the *beau ideal* of so many of his contemporaries, including Carlyle, Emerson, and Thoreau. In Ian Ker's magisterial *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (1988) there are over two dozen quotations of the phrase "private judgment," used by Newman in a pejorative sense. The subsequent "private judgment" of such charismatic moralists as Lenin, Mussolini, Stalin, and Hitler (who called himself an "arch-democrat," and argued in *Mein Kampf* that "Popularity is always the basis of authority") was in the century after Newman's death to be carried to catastrophic heights undreamed of in the philosophy of the nineteenth-century "liberators." Perhaps only Nietzsche foresaw—and fitfully applauded—the advent of the post-moral phase of human history that would issue in "the nihilism of the aesthete" (Raymond Aron's lapidary phrase) that pervades our cultural climate today.

Even such contemporary antagonists of Newman as J. A. Froude showed a wary respect for his view that the liberal humanism of nineteenth-century England, America, and much of Europe was an unstable, transitory phase to something far darker, not the utopian "dawn" so widely expected until World War I. As Robert Blake tells us of Newman's contemporary Disraeli, the belief in progress and material prosperity "struck no echo" in that statesman's mind: "'Progress to what and from where?'"

"Our race's progress and perfectibility is a dream," Newman wrote in 1852. What was wrong—and is wrong—with the faith in progress is that not only is historical change not ipso facto benign, but that without a shared knowledge, understanding, and belief in the Good, "the objective moral order," there can be no coherent, believable, or effective knowledge of how to improve either the self *or* society. Liberalism of whatever stripe cannot ground ethics, cannot constitute or legitimate a real *res publica*. Liberal

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relativists can raise doubts, but not children. "A state is in its very idea a society," Newman wrote in 1853, "and a society is a collection of many individuals made one by their participation in some common possession, and to the extent of that common possession, the presence of that possession held in common constitutes the life, and the loss of it constitutes the dissolution, of a state."

This is the voice and tradition of Burke, himself a proponent of natural law. And like Burke, Newman saw that "progressive," secular rationalism was more likely to lead to the anarchy of competitive self-interest than to common moral effort or utilitarian social progress: "The sentiment of the sacredness in institutions fades away, and the measure of truth or expediency is the private judgment of the individual. An endless variety of opinion is the certain though slow result; no overpowering majority of judgments is found to decide what is good and what is bad; political measures become acts of compromise; and at length the common bond of unity in the state consists in nothing really common, but simply in the unanimous wish of each member of it to secure his own interests." Is there a better brief summary of the effects of Western liberalism and libertarianism over the past two centuries? Authority dissolves; but of course will, appetite, and power do not; the traditional *res publica*, the labor of long ages, wanes; the so-called "liberated self" waxes.

Newman's political astuteness was joined to a psychological penetration evident not only in his novels, poems, and letters, but in his sermons and epistemological-theological works as well. The mistrust of subjectivism was based not on an uncritical authoritarianism but on an awareness of almost clairvoyant acuteness of each human self's ontological density and depth and of its need for the immemorial moral tradition constituted by conscience, "the aboriginal vicar of Christ," as he called it in *The Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875). Each human self is an abyss of possibilities, for good and ill. In *Proper Studies*, Aldous Huxley paid tribute to Newman's "analysis of the psychology of thought," which "remains one of the most acute, as it is certainly the most elegant, which has ever been made." Regulated by the realities of God and conscience, Newman's fastidious insight and sensitivity never degenerated into the aestheticism that was ascendant during the last third of his life or the subsequent nominalist relativism that pervades our time. A turning point in his life had come in 1827, at age twenty-six, when the brilliantly successful young Oxford don had realized the dangers of fashionable rationalism: "I was beginning to prefer intellectual excellence to moral; I was drifting in the direction of the Liberalism of the day" (*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*).

The alluring illusions and pleasures of secular rationalism—its pride, its curiosity, its moral instability, its arrogation of rights without duties, its love of novelty and "originality"—were apparent to Newman from his personal and social experience as an intellectual moving toward the apex of English intellectual life. The intellect had its own proper sphere and its unique excellences—about which no one has written more appreciatively than Newman—but: "Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another. . . . Philosophy, however enlightened, however profound, gives no command over the passions, no influential motives, no vivifying principles." Second things suffer by being put first. Intellectuals and their admirers persist in taking intellectual virtues—real, good, and valuable in their place—"for what they are not . . . arrogating for them a praise to which they have no claim. Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man" (*The Idea of a University*).

The history of the follies and fanaticisms of intellectuals during and since Newman's time gives great weight to his argument. As Tocqueville put it in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, "It has been said that the character of the philosophy of the eighteenth century was a sort of adoration of human intellect, an unlimited confidence in its power to transform at will laws, institutions, customs. To be accurate, it must be said that the human intellect which some of these philosophers adored was simply their own." And as for the subsequent modern rationalism, it is a protean phenomenon, taking ever-varying shapes and hues, from the most amoral and corrosive skepticism to the most passionate and dogmatic ideological commitment.

Newman is clearly the lineal descendant of a native British tradition of skepticism about skepticism—the heir of Dryden, Swift, Johnson, and Burke, not to mention the more particular traditions of Patristic and Anglican theology. But his estimate of intellectualism has a powerful contemporary resonance. The historian of Soviet Communism Leonard Schapiro wrote a few years ago that "the judgments on Stalin, if collected, would present such a catalogue of the folly of intellectuals as ought to prevent those of us who claim to belong to this category from ever raising our voices again." The grim stranglehold of tenured contemporary Freudians, Marxists, and Deconstructionists on the humanities departments of American universities as well as on scholarly publications and publishers provides fresh evidence for Newman's address to his colleagues. "You sit in your easy chairs, you dogmatize in your lecture rooms, you wield your pens; it all looks well on paper: you write exceedingly well." But the proof is in the practice: "Go and carry it all out in the world."

Not surprisingly, the Pope's language in praising Newman's heroic practice of the theological and clas-

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sical virtues is the traditional language of normative moral discourse, a language rooted in the belief in conscience as the essence of the human person. *"Habeo conscientiam, ergo humanus sum,"* goes an old stoic or scholastic maxim: "I have a conscience, therefore I am a human being."

The greatest novelists of Newman's time saw and depicted the divine reality of conscience as the *imago Dei* within the human person more clearly and dependably than did most of their secular intellectual contemporaries. In his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, Newman wrote that in his lifetime conscience as the normative mark of the human person, and the basis of the only sane and enduring *res publica*, had "been superseded by a counterfeit," the ultimately anarchic assertion of "the right of self-will," what Nietzsche would glorify as the "will to power" of the boldly post-moral individual. "All through my day," Newman wrote,

> there has been a resolute warfare, I had almost said conspiracy, against the rights of conscience, as I have described it. [Learning] and science have been embodied in great institutions in order to put it down. Noble buildings have been reared as fortresses against that spiritual, invisible influence which is too subtle for science. . . . Chairs in Universities have been made the seats of an antagonist tradition.

How much truer has this been in our own century, when great political regimes have been erected to deny and destroy this normative assumption about the human person and his fundamental nature and dignity as a creature participating in a realm of absolute value, and when cosseted and highly paid intellectuals promote "anti-foundational," post-moral discourse from just such Chairs.

Like Jonathan Swift, Newman was a celibate clergyman, an Aristotelian Christian, a great controversialist and satirist, and an intellectual who mistrusted mere intellect and intellectuals as a class. In a famous 1725 letter to Alexander Pope, Swift disputed the definition of the human person as *animal rationale* and insisted that he should be defined as an animal only *rationis capax—capable* of reason. This sharply unillusioned perception of the realities of human nature was shared by Newman: "After all, man is *not* a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal" (*The Tamworth Reading Room*).

Yet Newman was no existentialist, fideist, or irrationalist. "Right reason, that is, Reason rightly exercised, leads the mind to the Catholic faith, and plants it there," he wrote in *The Idea of a University*, but "Reason, considered as a real agent in the world . . . is far from taking so straight . . . a direction." The real operation of individual selves in the world, he said in the *Apologia*, is often characterized by "the fierce energy of passion and the all-corroding, all-dissolving skepticism of the intellect." He goes on to assert that he is not referring to the *recta ratio* of Scholasticism, the normative *sapientia* of the Christian tradition, the baptized Aristotle of natural law: "I am not speaking here of right reason, but of reason as it acts in fact and concretely in fallen man." Like close, orthodox observers of the phenomenology of the human spirit from St. Paul onward, Newman saw that human wit was often lawyer to human will, that reason could easily and plausibly be made to disguise and subserve self-interest. Newman's view of what it means to be a truly "reasonable being" is, in the words of J. M. Cameron, "not only to employ those capacities to be seen at work in the historian . . . natural scientist . . . and mathematician," but "also to respond to the claims of morality and religion."

It is this precise knowledge of the actual scope, character, and course of human reason, its potential apprehensions of the true and the good, its perennial gravitational pull toward self-interest and self-will, that makes Newman perennially relevant. His voice is his own, but not only his own; his view is his own, but not only his own. The ghostly witness to Christian humanism speaks in an eternal present to each new reader, as only the greatest writers do.

Whether or not Newman deserves to be beatified for his sanctity, he deserves to be read and imitated for his prudence and perceptiveness about divine and human realities. Like Dostoevsky, he saw that if and where there is no God, there is no man. The human person is called into his humanity by the perennial and normative voice of reason and conscience, "a word very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." In *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II recently called Newman "that outstanding defender of the rights of conscience," and he went on to quote his insight that "Conscience has rights because it has duties." It is an unflattering mirror for a "liberated" culture, but a true one. FT

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Interpreting the Bible: Three Views

Late last year the Vatican released the report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church." The editors of First Things *commissioned the following responses to this important document.*

Paul M. Blowers

The second-century Christian theologian Irenaeus of Lyons once described the interpretation of the Bible as being like placing together a grand mosaic, or like assembling Homeric verses into their correct and coherent plot structure. Gnostic allegorizers, Irenaeus argued, had scattered the gems of the scriptural mosaic and configured them again to form an alien portrait. In rereading the Bible, moreover, they had come up with the wrong story line, one foreign to the Church's Rule of Faith, the central dramatic narrative of salvation history that was the very substance of the biblical revelation. What made the Gnostics' exegesis so damaging was not that it was subjective as such, but that its subjectivity was not grounded in the Church's perspective. Gnostics were thus fated to telling the world a wholly different story of creation and redemption. For all their hermeneutical sophistication, they had missed the very mystery of divine revelation that permeated the scriptural witness of prophets and apostles, a mystery that could be fathomed only within the context of the Church's Christocentric experience and life.

Irenaeus, for all his troubles with the Gnostics, could hardly have imagined the changes in the landscape of biblical interpretation eighteen centuries later. No longer, since the Enlightenment, is it virtually universally presupposed that the Church or the Synagogue is the primary matrix and context for expounding and appropriating Scripture. Today there are many and diverse claimants to the Book of Books, many and diverse interpretative cultures. Historicism may have taken some knocks of late but, as Jon Levenson reminded First Things readers in February of last year ("The Bible: Unexamined Commitments of Criticism"), there are not a few apologists of biblical-critical studies who still, in the name of value-neutral objectivity and good scholarly citizenship, insist that Bible stories are honestly comprehensible only to that academy or guild where they are rendered transparent to the time- and culture-bound ideologies that underlie the texts.

On the other side of the spectrum are literary critics who aspire instead to liberate human subjectivity in reading scriptural texts. Scripture still has a story to tell, but it comes to life, they say, only as individual readers or communities put their own questions to the Bible and, spurning the superficialities of "authorial" or "original" meaning as well as "traditional" interpretations, construct ever new semantic possibilities out of the linguistic stuff of the texts. A good novelist may then be a better judge of biblical truth than a philologist, a historian, or a theologian.

Meanwhile, what words of comfort can be spoken to all those postmodern people (churched and unchurched) who, in the absence of a compelling rendition of the biblical narrative, as Robert Jenson writes, "simply do not apprehend or inhabit a narratable world"? Who will make sense of their lives and their world in the light of the biblical drama of creation and redemption?

The Pontifical Biblical Commission's (PBC) recently published report on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" could not be more timely. Though it is formulated mainly as a statement on the resources, challenges, and "mission of exegesis" within the Catholic Church, the report also sends unmistakable signals to the broader cultures of biblical hermeneutics in "postmodernity." One signal is thoroughly clear: the Church is still the foundational context for expounding Scripture and the only promising medium for actualizing the Word of God through new "retellings" (*relectures*) of the biblical story.

The early sections of the report set out a strategy for accommodating a variety of hermeneutical methodologies without paying exclusive homage to any one. The PBC remains realistically committed to the classic resources of historical-critical interpretation insofar as they can open windows to the ancient communities of faith that both produced Scripture and were shaped by Scripture. "Diachronic" interpretation, the treatment of texts from the standpoint of their formation and redaction in changing circumstances over time, continues to provide important insights into the historical constraints on the original intentionality and "literal" sense of the Scriptures.

Yet the Bible is still live communication. The more recent "synchronic" approaches (literary and rhetorical analysis, narrative criticism, semiotics, etc.), which look at scriptural texts primarily as finished units or structures of discourse, can thus be of great assistance in bringing out the language of persuasion, the storied character, and the symbolic richness of the Bible so as to realize genuine interaction between the ancient text and modern readerships. Narrative analysis, in particular, has not only helped to rescue the Bible from historicism but inhibited the reduction of the Bible to a transparent body of propo-

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sitional truths (contra fundamentalism). It has recovered the imperative, intrinsic to Scripture itself, "both to tell the story of salvation (the informative aspect) and to tell the story in view of salvation (the performative aspect)."

The PBC report projects a constructive collaboration of "diachronic" and "synchronic" interpretation. In the best of all possible exegetical worlds this is the model. Many scholars will nevertheless see this goal as highly optimistic in the "real world" of biblical interpretation where exegetical battles are waged amid the complex networks of academic guilds, well-defined hermeneutical schools of thought, and other channels of scholarly influence in which loyalties are strong, and in which committed Christian and Jewish exegetes must still practice their craft. A case in point is the interpretation of the Pentateuch according to the Four-Source Theory (Documentary Hypothesis), which was for years largely unchallenged in the academy until more recent literary-critical analysis began to stake its claim. Many interpreters are insisting now that the textual dissonance and tensions within the Pentateuch (the dual creation accounts in Genesis 1-2 are a salient example, but there are many more) need not be explained, diachronically, in terms of multiple editorial sources, but synchronically, by the artistry of authors who, in shaping the narratives, retained the tensions as integral to the discourse. There is no consensus that diachronic and synchronic interpretations can coexist; some biblical critics say they are downright incompatible.

The academy, though, can absorb seemingly countless exegetical differences and the impasses to which they may lead. In the Church, where the reading of Scripture for the life-giving Word makes the stakes of interpretation prohibitively higher, plurality and diversity of perspectives—among exegetes, between exegetes and theologians, etc.—can bring progress in understanding only because of a shared rule of faith, a common interpretative lens, operative in the ecclesial community. The Church, the PBC points out, has the advantage of

> a pre-understanding which holds together modern scientific culture and the religious tradition emanating from ancient Israel and from the early Christian community. [Catholic exegetes'] interpretations stand thereby in continuity with a dynamic pattern of interpretation that is found within the Bible itself and continues in the life of the Church. This dynamic pattern corresponds to the requirement that there be a lived affinity between the interpreter and the object, an affinity which constitutes, in fact, one of the conditions that make the entire exegetical enterprise possible.

In its later chapters, the PBC report thus draws upon and further articulates a foundational axiom of Catholic hermeneutics, the presupposed organic interrelation between Scripture and the Church's interpretative tradition. That relation began within the New Testament itself, as the early Christians "discerned" their own identity by interpreting the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ in the light of the Hebrew Scriptures. It continued in the Church's "discernment" of a full Christian biblical canon. And it continues now in the Church's ongoing commitment to "discerning" the fullness of the biblical revelation in new historical contexts by availing itself of intertextual exegesis, canon criticism, and the history of biblical interpretation (especially the theologically rich patristic exegetical tradition).

The theme of "discernment" is an important current running through this entire document. Revelation is discerned, not apprehended directly or mechanically. And the authoritative claims of the Bible on the Church are not primarily those of law or of dogma. As Sean McEvenue has argued, the Bible's authority is most basically a *spiritual authority*, effective and convertive. Transformation is concomitant with understanding. The PBC report thus recognizes that biblical study and interpretation are completed only in conjunction with "spiritual experience and the discernment of the Church." "Exegesis produces its best results when it is carried out in the context of the living faith of the Christian community, which is directed toward the salvation of the entire world." The closing sections of the report set forth the mission of actualizing, inculturating, and contextualizing the biblical message in the modern world. This missionary focus, however, must be rooted in the continuing consumption of Scripture within the Church itself—through the reading of the Bible in the liturgy, through the practices of spiritual meditation on Scripture, through its use in pastoral ministry, and through the study of the Bible in ecumenical exchanges.

Given the landscape of contemporary biblical studies, Protestants should identify profoundly with the appeal of the PBC boldly to reaffirm the Church's hermeneutical prerogatives. H. Richard Niebuhr spoke for many of us when he wrote in his *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941) that

> in Protestantism we have long attempted to say what we mean by revelation by pointing to the Scriptures, but we have found that we cannot do so save as we interpret them in a community in which men listen for the word of God in the reading of the Scriptures, or in which men participate in the same spiritual history out of which the record came.

The PBC report may serve notice across the ecu-

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menical board that the "discernment" of the mystery of biblical revelation, the unfolding of the full implications of the biblical story of salvation for the Church and for the world, will demand hermeneutical courage, theological depth, ecclesial and pastoral commitment, and a spirituality rooted both in the Bible and the Christian tradition.

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Jon D. Levenson

Carl E. Braaten has suggested that the foundational assumption of the report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," is the hermeneutical equivalent of the Definition of Chalcedon (451 C.E.). Whatever the limitations of the analogy, it is surely the case that just as that ancient conciliar statement affirmed the indivisibility and inseparability of the humanity of Christ from his divinity, so does the Commission's report reaffirm that Scripture is the "word of God in human language," repeatedly insisting that the two natures of the text can never be altogether decoupled.

This, in turn, accounts for a certain two-sidedness in the document itself, which continually embraces modern methods of biblical study but then warns of their limitations. "Psychology and psychoanalysis," for example, "lead to a multidimensional understanding of Scripture and help decode the human language of revelation," but they "should not serve to eliminate the reality of sin and of salvation." Modern methods, including even those that originate in secular sciences, can illuminate the sacred text in important, even essential ways, but as the report says of cultural anthropology, they are powerless "to determine what is specifically the content of revelation." The resulting report is thus generally one of admirable balance and thoughtfulness. It is also wonderfully comprehensive and concise, a document of great value to both Catholic and non-Catholic interpreters of the Bible.

The divine nature of the text comes from its ultimate author, or, as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger puts it in his preface, its "genuine author, God." It is this dimension that recedes or disappears when the historical-critical method of modern academic biblical scholarship is, in the words of the report, granted "sole validity." As Ratzinger correctly and astutely observes, this can result in "putting the [biblical] word back into the past completely so that it is no longer taken in its actuality" and "only [its] human dimension appears as real." This is precisely the effect (and often also the intention) of many programs in biblical studies in universities and even seminaries today. How this desacralization can be avoided in academic communities that are not religiously homogeneous is a pressing issue to many of us, but not one addressed in the report, which is, as its title indicates, interested only in "The Interpretation of the Bible in the [Roman Catholic] Church." Instead, the Commission seems to believe that the divine dimension of Scripture will be protected if only there is "full participation on the part of exegetes in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time," if "church authority [sees] to it that . . . interpretation remains faithful to the great tradition which has produced the texts," and so on.

The fact remains, however, that unless the Catholic Church (re)ghettoizes itself, as I think to be logistically impossible, its exegetes will continue to be integral members of communities of interpretation that are religiously diverse and whose lingua franca has long been historicism and naturalism—that is, philosophical positions averse to the monotheistic traditions and biased toward secularity. If the transcendent dimension of the text is to be upheld without suppressing the human, historical dimension, means will have to be found to prosecute biblical scholarship on genuinely public grounds—that is, on grounds that are pluralistic, and not simply historicistic and naturalistic. How this can be done is an issue as vexing as it is pressing and one on which the Commission offers no help. A schizoid solution—the Catholic exegete as Catholic in church but historicist in the academy—will not effectively redress the recession of the divine dimension of the text that Ratzinger opposes.

It is the frank recognition of the human dimension of the Scripture that accounts for the report's stern and repeated denunciations of fundamentalism, which "fails to recognize that the word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods" and thus "considers historical everything that is reported or recounted with verbs in the past tense." As a result "[i]t injects into life a false certitude" and even "invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide." Nothing else that this remarkably open and learned report addresses—not even feminist exegesis (which "has brought many benefits") or Marxist liberationism—comes in for so much censure as fundamentalism. This may partially reflect the gains that various Protestant fundamentalist groups have made in historically Catholic countries in recent years, while Marxism, for example (which has committed literal suicide repeatedly of late, not to mention mass murder earlier), has dramatically lost credibility (except among professors, especially of theology) along with the ability to threaten Rome. But the Commission's eagerness to distance itself from fundamentalism also reflects its conviction that "the historical-critical method . . . when used in an objective manner, implies of itself no a priori" and therefore cannot threaten Catholic doctrine.

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The notion of a method without a priori suppositions is philosophically naive and easily falsified in the case at hand. One a priori of historical critics, for example, is the absence of clairvoyance. Since the Book of Isaiah (who lived in the eighth century B.C.E.) speaks of Cyrus (who lived in the sixth), they therefore must conclude, as did some medieval Jewish commentators as well, that the chapters that do so were added later as a *vaticinium ex eventu.* Without the a priori naturalism, one could instead argue that Isaiah had a gift of foreknowledge, as befits a prophet (though this would, of course, still not explain the stylistic differences between the various sections of the book that now goes by his name). While I quite agree with the Commission about the historically conditioned character of all texts and the corollary inadequacy of fundamentalism, it seems to me to be evading the tensions (if not outright contradictions) between the divine and the human dimensions that its own a priori suppositions ascribe to the Bible.

It also evades the possibility that the "more precise understanding of the truth of sacred Scripture" that the historical-critical method yields can lead to the denial of magisterial teaching. I think, for example, of Father John P. Meier's courageous presidential address at the general meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association in 1991, entitled, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus in Ecumenical Perspective." The ecumenical issue is simple: whereas the Roman Catholic Church teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary, some communions, following references in the New Testament to Jesus' siblings, do not affirm her virginity to have continued beyond the time of his birth. An extremely learned and meticulous historical-critical analysis compelled Fr. Meier to conclude that "if—prescinding from faith and later Church teaching—the historian or exegete is asked to render a judgment on the New Testament and patristic texts we have examined, viewed simply as historical sources, the most probable opinion is that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were true siblings," and not cousins (or half-siblings by some hypothetical previous marriage of Joseph) as some post-canonical traditions came to assert. The question remains, however, whether the "later Church teaching" (from which the responsible historical-critical scholar will necessarily prescind) can be valid when it contradicts the New Testament itself. Could Mary have been a perpetual virgin when the evangelists (not to mention Josephus) not only did not know this but thought otherwise?

The same sort of issue arises not only in regard to divisive ecumenical issues such as the interpretation of Mary or Peter. It also affects basic issues of Christology, which the Commission takes as settled. For one of the consequences of historical-critical study is to cast doubt on the assumption that the Bible is, as the report puts it, "a gathering together of a whole array of witnesses from one great tradition." On the contrary, this kind of study shows that there never was "one great tradition" and that the organic unfolding of each stage of tradition from the one that preceded, without jarring disjunctions and flimsy harmonizations, is a chimera. This is a painful thought for any traditionalist (including a traditional Jew like myself), but intellectual honesty requires that it be faced.

Lest the Protestant reader be tempted to feel triumphalistic at this point, it must be noted that those jarring disjunctions occur not only between Scripture and tradition but also within each. Indeed, the biblical idea of the Virgin Birth itself, known from Matthew and Luke, is completely unattested in Mark, John, and Paul. The Apostle to the Gentiles, in fact, described Jesus as "born of a woman" (Galations 4:4) where an adherent of pious harmonization would surely have expected to read "born of a virgin."

When the members of the Commission tell us that "the interpretation of one particular text has to avoid seeking to dominate at the expense of others," they are thus conceding more of their own tradition than they realize. Without such domination, orthodoxy deconstructs. The Church can, of course, affirm the fuller traditions of Matthew and Luke to be normative (as it has), but it cannot expect historical criticism to ratify that choice or even to support it. The historical study of the development of texts in the environments that produced the Bible often suggests quite the opposite—that the fuller text has undergone midrashic embellishment and is therefore less reliable *historically* (whatever its *literary* or *theological* value). However deep the personal piety and ecclesial obedience of a historical critic may be, his method compels him to cast doubt on historical claims based on traditions at a significant remove from the events in question. The affirmation of ongoing tradition and the critical study of history are willy-nilly often at cross purposes.

Another difficulty is that the Commission's report handles the Old Testament considerably more critically than the New, on which it tends to fall back into fuzzy mystical language. For example, its affirmation that the "hyperbole" of "the royal psalms and messianic prophecies . . . had to be taken literally" after the unexpected death and resurrection of Jesus is more pious than critical. Supposedly, the psalmist's extravagant affirmation that the king's rule will be everlasting (Psalm 45:7) can now be seen to refer to Jesus' endless reign. The problem is this: at the level of *literal* reality, Jesus' kingship, which died aborning, is *more* of a hyperbole than that to which the psalmist referred, not less. A more historically defensible claim is that some early Christians used the mythological language of the old Judahite royal theology to conceptualize their experience of Jesus. The failure of Jesus to return and fulfill the old messianic

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expectations (despite reports of his resurrection) only heightened the eschatological understanding of the royal theology, already attested in Judaism. The extravagant promises would become reality at the end of time, but not before. On this reading, Judaism and Christianity, despite their irreconcilable difference on the identity of the messianic king, agree on a point that the Commission seems to have missed: the hyperbole of the royal psalms and the messianic prophecies will remain just that until kingdom come.

The treatment of Jesus himself in the report of the Commission exhibits scant influence from the historical-critical method, though the report elsewhere (and, in my judgment, correctly) pronounces it to be "indispensable." "Right from the start of his public ministry," we are told, "Jesus adopted a personal and original stance different from the accepted interpretation of his age, that 'of the scribes and Pharisees,'" citing "his sovereign freedom with respect to Sabbath observance" and "his way of relativizing the precepts of ritual purity," among other instances. Those intellectually suicidal fundamentalists would have no objection to this formulation, but some historical critics, Christian as well as Jewish, would suggest that since the observance of Jewish law was a hotly disputed issue among Jesus' disciples after his death, it is unlikely that he pronounced definitively against it during his lifetime, and that the passages in which he does so have been put into his mouth by later Christians for polemical purposes. A prime target of the polemic was Judaism. The problem with the report's brief formulation of these issues is thus not only the fundamentalistic assumption that Jesus said what the gospels attribute to him; it is also that Jesus' continuity with the Judaism of his time (including the Judaism of those patently ridiculous New Testament Pharisees) has been grossly minimized. You would almost think he was Catholic.

Thus, though the report condemns anti-Semitic interpretations of the Christian Bible, it seems unaware of the extent to which such interpretations continue certain polemical tendencies within the Scripture itself, tendencies that have influenced the portrayal of Jesus. So long as the figure of Jesus is protected from rigorous historical-critical analysis, the danger of anti-Semitic interpretation will survive, and precious opportunities for deepening the Church's understanding of its Scripture will be lost. There is no substitute for the cauterization through historical criticism of the virulent anti-Semitic statements that have been put in the mouth of Jesus. Without this, the Church's denunciations of anti-Semitism ring hollow.

When the historical-critical method *has* been applied to the figure of Jesus, however, it has historically, to one degree or another, driven a wedge between the historical person and the composite literary figure of the New Testament text—that is, between two venerable items in Christian theology, the word of God in human incarnation and the word of God in human language. Perhaps the Chalcedonian hermeneutic is less durable than first seems the case.

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Robert L. Wilken

When Origen of Alexandria was preaching on Joshua 7, the account of the capture of the Canaanite city of Ai by the Israelites, his hearers asked him: What does this have to do with us? What value is it to know that the inhabitants of Ai were vanquished, as though this battle was more significant than others? Why does the Holy Spirit include this event and ignore the fall of other, more famous cities? It is a question that is inevitable in a sermon. When the Bible is read by the faithful, especially in Christian worship, the preacher must ask of the text not simply, "What does the text mean?" but "What does the text mean for us?"

The new document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" addresses this problem. Within the last several decades the historical study of the Bible (in its many contemporary forms) has gained widespread acceptance in the Church. So great is its hold on biblical scholarship today that its methods are widely assumed to be normative for all interpretation of the Bible. Biblical exegesis is conceived of as a historical and scholarly enterprise carried on by specialists in ancient languages and literature and, more recently, by scholars of social and cultural history.

Yet, argues the Commission, the seeming hegemony of historical criticism is deceptive. "At the very time when the most prevalent scientific method—the 'historical-critical method'—is freely practiced in exegesis, including Catholic exegesis, it is itself brought into question." Even within scholarly circles one can detect mounting criticism of the present direction of biblical studies. But this report is not directed at debates within the guild; it has in mind a deeper and more troubling problem: "Many of the faithful judge the method deficient from the point of view of faith." For some, the Commission asserts, biblical criticism has made the Bible a "closed book," to which the words of the gospel seem applicable: "You have taken away the key of knowledge; you have not entered in yourselves and you have hindered those who sought to enter." (Luke 11:52)

Strong words these, and they do not come from fundamentalists. These are the judgments of biblical

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scholars as well as bishops. What is more, the authors of this document are ardent defenders of the legitimacy and necessity of biblical criticism: "The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts." Without the use of historical criticism, argues the Commission, there can be no serious study of the Bible. Its methods have "made it possible to understand far more accurately the intention of the authors and editors of the Bible as well as the message which they addressed to their first readers. The achievement of these results has lent the historical-critical method an importance of the highest order."

Fully one-third of the report is devoted to a sympathetic (though not uncritical) presentation of the most widespread "methods" now in use in the scholarly community: historical criticism; literary analysis (including rhetorical, narrative, semiotic analysis); tradition history; use of human sciences (sociology, anthropology); contextual approaches (liberationist, feminist), et al. The report can and should be read, as Cardinal Ratzinger suggests in his preface, as a confirmation of the "largely positive" evaluation of historical-critical scholarship found in earlier ecclesiastical documents, e.g., *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII (1943), *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1964), and the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council (1965).

But the significance of this report is not that it defends the legitimacy of historical criticism. Its timeliness is that it reflects a thoughtful turning away from the easy acceptance of the methods of biblical criticism and offers an argument on behalf of a more theological, spiritual, Christological interpretation of the Bible. The report does not claim that historical criticism is illegitimate. It recognizes that the Bible is a book of the past and that it is a fit subject of historical inquiry. What the Commission claims is that a solely historical approach to the Bible has limited usefulness for the Church. The Bible speaks not only about the past but also about the present and the future. The question "What does the text mean for us?" can never be peripheral to the work of biblical interpretation.

Biblical scholarship, however, has largely become a world to itself, divorced from the Church's theological and spiritual traditions. For most of the Church's history, theology and scriptural interpretation were one. Theology was called *sacra pagina*, and the task of interpreting the Bible was a theological enterprise. The Church's faith and life was seen as continuous with the Bible. Even the Reformation appeal to "sola scriptura" assumed that the Bible was the book of the Church and its interpretation was to be shaped by the creeds and councils, the liturgy, the theological tradition. For the reformers the Christological interpretation of the prophets *was* the literal meaning of the text. In short, the Bible was read within the framework of the Church's teaching and practice.

With the emergence of new historical disciplines in the eighteenth century and the application of these disciplines to the Scriptures, scholars began, unwittingly at first, to construct a new context to take the place of the Church. The aim was to break free of the patterns that had shaped Christian interpretation for centuries. The Bible came to be seen more and more as a book of the ancient world; hence its interpretation was primarily a historical enterprise.

The more the Bible was studied historically and philologically, the more it came to appear foreign to Christian faith and life. It was taken as axiomatic that the scholarly study of the Bible had to exclude references to Christian teaching. The notion that the Nicene Creed might play a role in understanding the biblical conception of God appeared ludicrous. As a consequence biblical scholarship acquired a life of its own as a historical enterprise independent of the Church (and of the Synagogue). Today its home is the university.

The other Bible, the Bible of the Church, however, lives, and, one might add, people live (and die) by it. Scholars will continue to write books about the original setting of Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53, but the Christian interpretation of these texts is fixed in the minds of the faithful and it is not going to go away. The Church's interpretation is embedded in the liturgy, in hymns, in the catechetical tradition, and—let us not forget—in the Bible itself. The Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 begins in the New Testament. If one has a quarrel with the Church's interpretation of the Bible the debate is not with Origen or St. Augustine or St. Bernard, it is with St. Paul and St. Matthew.

It is one thing, however, to recount the limitations of biblical scholarship, quite another to propose a way beyond the present difficulties. The value of the report of the Commission is that it offers a constructive response, one that is firmly rooted in the classical exegetical tradition of the Church, yet at the same time attentive to the intellectual developments of the last two centuries. What the Commission offers is a defense of the "spiritual interpretation" of the Bible. Its arguments are informed, nuanced, and sophisticated, but the very use of the term "spiritual" will provoke controversy. "Spiritual interpretation" seems to suggest that the way forward is to go backward, to abandon the accomplishments of the last two hundred years and to return to a precritical reading of the Bible. From "spiritual interpretation," some will say, it is only a tiny step to medieval allegory and all its evil works.

The Commission is aware of the risks in reintroducing the term "spiritual." For this reason it addresses the most obvious criticism of the "spiritual" sense, namely, that it ignores the historical meaning.

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Its argument is elegantly simple: spiritual exegesis means interpreting the Bible in light of history, the history of God's revelation in Christ. That is, "spiritual" means "historical," reading the Scriptures through the prism of Christ's death and Resurrection: "The spiritual sense," the Commission writes, "results from setting the text in relation to real *facts* which are not foreign to it; the paschal event [the death and Resurrection of Christ], in all its inexhaustible richness, which constitutes the summit of the divine intervention in the history of Israel, to the benefit of all mankind."

In its zeal to understand the Bible historically, biblical scholarship has ignored the history that is at the center of the Christian Bible, the Incarnation of the divine Logos, the passion and death of Christ, the sending of the Holy Spirit to create the Church. Within Christian tradition, historical means Christological and ecclesiological. If the Bible is interpreted in this way, it must be read as a book that speaks not only of the past but of life in Christ within the Church. The Christian exegetical tradition assumes that what happened historically finds its fulfillment in the present. The writer to Hebrews takes the word "today" in Psalm 95, "*Today* if you do not harden your hearts," to refer to the present, when "*we* become partners of Christ." (Hebrews 3:7-14) In his great work on the Christian exegetical tradition, *Exegese Medievale*, Henri DeLubac, the French Jesuit, entitled one chapter Quotidie, "today." According to the spiritual interpretation, that which happened once in the past is made present "today" in the Church's sacramental life and in the lives of the faithful.

At the beginning of his "literal" commentary on Genesis, St. Augustine wrote: "No Christian will dare say that the [biblical] narrative must not be taken in a spiritual sense." In support of this he cites the familiar words of Paul in 1 Corinthians, "Now all these things that happened to them were symbolic." But then he gives an example of how St. Paul actually interpreted the Bible. In Ephesians 5, for example, Paul quotes the words from Genesis 2: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Paul, observes Augustine, gives the text a "spiritual meaning" by referring it to the Church. "This is a great mystery," he writes, "and I am applying it to Christ and the Church."

For Augustine the spiritual interpretation is built on the historical meaning. In the case of 1 Corinthians, Paul was referring to actual events that had taken place in the desert during the Exodus from Egypt. The "symbolic" meaning does not displace the reality of the events of which they are a symbol. Likewise, Paul assumes that Genesis 2 is speaking about the physical coming together of a man and a woman in marriage. "One flesh" refers to a carnal action. Yet St. Paul says that this coming together also has a spiritual meaning referring to the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church.

Following Paul and Augustine, indeed the Church's unanimous tradition, the Commission insists that the spiritual meaning depends on the historical or literal meaning: "While there is a distinction between the two senses, the spiritual sense can never be stripped of its connection with the literal sense." Without the prior literal sense the spiritual meaning—or, as some prefer, the mystical meaning—is evanescent. Spiritual interpretation, then, does not mean the imposition of esoteric meanings on the text, but the discernment of the sense that is unveiled by the Incarnation of the divine Word and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Three things, according to the Commission, converge in a spiritual interpretation of the Bible: the biblical text, the paschal mystery, and the present circumstances of life in the Spirit.

The medieval church expressed its understanding of the spiritual sense in the following distich: Littera gesta docet; quod credas allegoria; quid agas moralia; quo tendas anagogia. "The letter teaches us what happened; what you are to believe is called allegory; what you are to do is called the moral sense; the anagogical sense has to do with the final end of your life." By dismissing the spiritual sense as a pious fantasy, modern critics have missed the profundity of this verse, and hence of the tradition of spiritual exegesis. For this ancient distich expresses what the Church has always believed about the Bible. The Bible records God's action in history (the letter), and it is the task of the interpreter to discern the relation between what is written there and what has come about (and will come about) because of what happened. The three latter senses show how this is best done, by relating the text to what we believe (allegory), to how we are to live (the moral sense), and to what we hope for (the anagogical sense). The God who was is also the God who is and is to come.

The spiritual understanding of the Bible is not a relic from the Middle Ages, a precritical expedient to make do until the advent of historical science. It is the distinctively Christian way of interpreting the Bible. John Henry Newman wrote: "In all ages of the Church, her teachers have shown a disinclination to confine themselves to the mere literal interpretation of Scripture. . . . It may almost be laid down as an historical fact that the mystical interpretation and orthodoxy will stand or fall together."

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Books In Review

History and the Moral Imagination

ON LOOKING INTO THE ABYSS: UNTIMELY THOUGHTS ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY. By GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB. *Knopf. 192 pp. $23.*

***Reviewed by* J. Bottum**

"IDEAS," wrote the Victorian and Roman Catholic historian Lord Acton, "have a radiation and development, an ancestry and posterity of their own, in which men play the part of godfathers and godmothers more than that of legitimate parents." Gertrude Himmelfarb has found repeated occasion over the years to quote Acton's words, for they assign to ideas the untimely logic and the illogical timeliness that are both required for the intellectual history Professor Himmelfarb practices so well.

There is an old-fashioned sort of scholarship that studies ideas primarily as logical. "Philosophy consists in the concepts of philosophers, taken in the naked, impersonal necessity of both their contents and their relations," Etienne Gilson declares in *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (a book whose title betrays on several counts just how old-fashioned it has become). "The history of these concepts and of their relationships is the history of philosophy itself." And there is another sort of scholarship, only recently become old-fashioned, that studies ideas primarily as temporal—their contents predetermined by their presence at a moment in the history of something transhistorical: the Spirit of Freedom, Rationality, and Self-Consciousness, according to Hegel, or the economic class struggle, according to Marx. Ideas as Lord Acton describes them, however, have both an internal logic *and* an external timeliness, a content that is independent of time (though its consequences unfold in time) *and* an appearance at a particular moment in time for good historical reasons. The job of the intellectual historian is to explore the intersection of logic and time—to explore, in Professor Himmelfarb's case, a Victorian history in which Mill, Carlyle, Darwin, Newman, Arnold, and George Eliot are neither timeless gods delivering ideas as Zeus delivered Athena nor mindless puppets of history, but serious thinkers of serious purpose whose lives and times naturally suggested topics for their thought and whose influential thought itself constitutes an important part of history.

POSTMODERNIST history, however, refuses to grant the reality of either logic or time, though it does perhaps grant that history contains their intersection. History for the postmodernists is a fiction of order, an imposition of narrative and causal sequence on a set of historical documents the interpretation of which is complicated by the fact that at a certain point (somewhere around the Enlightenment, in our old-fashioned way of dating) the documents begin to betray an awareness of themselves as historical. History for the postmodernist is a novel by historians in which, three-quarters of the way through, the characters discover they are characters in a novel.

That the single truth of manifold truthlessness had already been expressed so often and so well would probably silence historians in a world in which postmodernism had triumphed. Before that day of triumph, however, postmodernism offers historians rewarding opportunities to shock and offend (without risking the usual consequences of shocking and offending) by presenting the histories of blasphemy, horror, insanity, silence, censorship, murder, oppression, rape—the darkness and the meanness that was always, for our sins, present in the world. An interest in these histories is the origin of the common cause made with postmodernism by feminist historians, who at least (whatever one thinks of their political aims and historical techniques) believe they have a moral responsibility to reclaim the neglected memory of women oppressed in the past. Postmodernist historians can claim no such responsibility; at last, they can only exploit the history of the neglected and oppressed in order to disrupt any claim to historical understanding.

This immorality of deconstructive postmodernism is finally what concerns Professor Himmelfarb in the opening and concluding essays of *On Looking into the Abyss*. Her writing is charged with a moral sense that has become weightier and more at the center of her thought since her *Victorian Minds* in 1968—a gravitas more appropriate to her later years, as she observes. The seven essays in *On Looking into the Abyss* were written for various occasions, and their unity comes not so much from their similar themes as from their similar moral weight. The book takes up several topics: academic postmodernism; the relation of Hegel and the young Marx to the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe; Mill's "One Very Simple Principle" in *On Liberty* (a text to which Professor Himmelfarb has turned many times); "The Dark and Bloody Crossroads" where nationalism and

J. BOTTUM *contributed "Christians and Postmoderns" to our February 1994 issue.*

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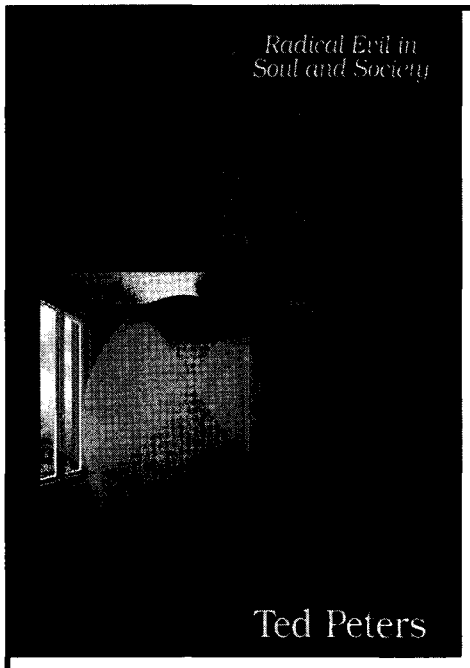
religion continue to meet despite Francis Fukuyama's recent proclamation of the "End of History"; the disappearance of footnotes in historical writing. But underlying them all is Professor Himmelfarb's concern with ideas in history and our ability to learn from them. Again and again, the essays appeal to three "notes" (as John Henry Newman might have called them) of her faith in the importance of history: a confidence in the possibility of the moral imagination; a certainty in the meaningfulness of the Holocaust; and a belief in the small but hard-won virtues of professionalism in the discipline of history.

In the French Revolution's "empire of light and reason," Edmund Burke complained, "all the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off." "All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies" are to be discarded. Burke's clothing metaphor is exact: clothes, like morals, are super-added—which is to say that morals, like clothes, would be fripperies were it always light and warm. But we live instead where it is too often cold and dark; beyond the French Revolution Napoleon waits, as beyond the Russian Revolution Stalin waits. The "moral imagination," a contemplation of feeling by an understanding accustomed to consider actions in moral terms, Burke thinks to be our best protection against tyranny.

OF COURSE, the problem with moral imagination, as Professor Himmelfarb observes, is that it takes hard work. "How the world is managed, and why it was created, I cannot tell," A. E. Housman once gloomily wrote (about minor errors in the editing of Latin manuscripts), "but it is no feather-bed for the repose of sluggards." A morality derived entirely from feeling—the emotivism, for instance, that the Bloomsbury Group thought they found in G. E. Moore—makes judgment an easy matter of aesthetic intuitions too much thought will only spoil. And a morality derived entirely from reason—the socialist ethics, for instance, the English Marxists held in the 1930s—makes judgment an easy matter of asserting the need to reform the whole society according to some rational principle. But a morality based on the moral imagination requires both feeling and reason—and long practice in using them to form and act upon judgments.

This sort of moral art cannot be taught, though it can be learned. In her essay "Of Heroes, Villains, and Valets," Professor Himmelfarb examines recent biographers' disdain for public life. We "contemplate with pleasure," the pre-Victorian lyricist Thomas Moore said of his biography of Byron, "a great mind in its undress." Believing we can see



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the real motives of public actors more clearly in their private behavior, Lytton Strachey mocked the eminent Victorians with details from their private lives. But it never occurred to either Moore or Strachey that public life was not somehow the reason for biography. Recent biographers, however, seem to deny the importance or even the reality of public life. If biographies of the famous are still being written, Professor Himmelfarb pointed out in her earlier *Marriage and Morals among the Victorians*, it is not because biographers believe in public life but simply because they have so much more material about the famous.

The denial of public life is a denial of heroes and villains, and the denial of heroes and villains makes the moral imagination Professor Himmelfarb demands impossible to learn. The dilemma of artistic practice is that the apprentice is required—at that initial moment in which he lacks all knowledge in his chosen art—to choose a master from whom to learn. By denying the public stage on which historical heroes and villains appear, we deny any chance for the ethical apprentice to learn the high-minded art of moral judgment from the models of history. A proper view of history, H. G. Wells claimed, would see Napoleon as a "cockerel on a dunghill"—which means Napoleon teaches nothing distinct from what Wells thought every public actor teaches: the vanity of public actors.

PROFESSOR Himmelfarb draws the title of *On Looking into the Abyss* from an essay by Lionel Trilling, from whose example she learned that moral seriousness is the proper attitude of the critic and in whose essays she finds the moral imagination at work. Called upon to teach modern literature, Trilling discovered to his dismay that his students appreciated modernist writing. "I asked them to look into the Abyss, and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: 'Interesting, am I not?'" The situation has worsened, Professor Himmelfarb observes, for Trilling's students were at least reading modern literature. Students today "are all too often reading books about how to read books." The theory of literature has replaced literature with itself as the subject of its own theory. Professor Himmelfarb is sharp, witty, and relentless in denouncing the tail-swallowing of postmodernist theory and its further domestication of the Abyss.

The glibness with which postmodernists accept the failure of beauty, truth, and value stands in strange contrast to the feelings of the modernists who first observed it. There is something deeply immoral in the pragmatic amorality of the American deconstructionist Richard Rorty's "light-minded estheticism"—something much more immoral than Nietzsche's deliberate anti-morality. "I myself, the one who has most single-handedly made this tragedy of tragedies," Nietzsche declares in *The Gay Science*, "I myself have killed all gods in the fourth act—out of morality! What should now become of the fifth act! Whence now take the tragic solution!—Must I begin to think about a comic solution?" But Nietzsche's laughter originates in outrage, and is directed as much at himself as at others. In the section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" (which may have suggested to Professor Himmelfarb the "Untimely Thoughts" of her book's subtitle), Nietzsche announces his disgust with the Victorians—Carlyle, Mill, "little moralistic females à la Eliot"—for their humorless failure to see they could not preserve Christian morality without the Christian God. After the death of God announced in *The Gay Science*, comedy alone remains; but it is a sick comedy, and its sickness calls forth Zarathustra's mockery in Nietzsche's next book. "And—still laughed at the master who does not laugh at himself," Nietzsche put in the epigraph to the second edition of *The Gay Science* (published after *Thus Spake Zarathustra*). After Nietzsche's mad, gigantic laughter, Rorty's impulse to "recontextualize just for the hell of it" and to "josh" us out of serious morality seems small and unrelated to the broad, open, Whitmanesque American virtues it tries to evoke with its self-consciously hayseed colloquialisms. It seems all the more immoral for its glib acceptance of Nietzsche's godless Abyss.

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ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE once suggested that somewhere between Mill and G. E. Moore (probably, she says, with Sidgwick) a strange skew occurred, after which no English academic moral philosopher can explain why "it cannot be right to kill the innocent as a means to any end whatsoever and that someone who thinks otherwise is in error." In the same way that Anscombe uses the murder of innocents as a touchstone by which to determine whether there is something wrong with a moral philosophy, Professor Himmelfarb uses the Holocaust to determine whether there is something wrong with a method of doing history. If a history devoted to "fictive" techniques and liberated from "fact fetishism" must twist and turn and violate its own theory to distinguish the *wrongness* of the Holocaust—the Holocaust as wrong in particular and not as wrong simply by the wrongness supposed to be present in all political events—we must reject its way of doing history.

Postmodernist philosophy is so truth-denying that it is hard to believe any historians actually hold it. The dating of historical events is deconstructed, Dominick LaCapra claims in a recent book on intellectual history, when we recognize its dependence on the "convenient fiction" of a dating system centered on the Birth of Christ. Professor Himmelfarb's response of the unhistorical nature of dating French history with the Jewish calendar misses just how radical is the epistemology of Jacques Derrida on which LaCapra relies. The fact that there are infinitely many systems we could use to measure or locate a thing in space and time does not prove the arbitrariness of the thing's measure or location, but only of the choice of system to express it. LaCapra's argument is persuasive only if the measured thing has measure merely by virtue of our measuring it, location in time merely by virtue of our dating it; it is persuasive, in other words, only if past events have no reality independent of historians.

We really have a duty to maintain the reality of the past. In "Where Have All the Footnotes Gone?"— a paean to Kate Turabian and the funniest essay in *On Looking into the Abyss*—Professor Himmelfarb defines professionalism in history as an act of faith in the discipline, respect toward the reader, and duty to past lives. The hermeneutic circle consists for historians in the fact that our present interests and assumptions, the concern with which leads us to investigate the past, are precisely what constitute our difference from that past. There is no easy escape from this circle, neither in denying the originating importance of the present nor in denying the real otherness of the past. Throughout her essays, Professor Himmelfarb sees the exercise of the professional virtues as marking the humility of the serious historian—a humility that requires the rejection of both the arrogant claim to recapture the past as it actu-

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ally was and the arrogant claim of the unreality of the past.

Jorge Luis Borges, whose strange, logic-game fiction contains the most disturbing philosophical indictment of traditional history (just as his involvement with totalitarianism, like Heidegger's and Paul de Man's, contains a moral indictment of the denial of traditional history), entitles a brief essay "The Modesty of History." Historians have always known, Professor Himmelfarb writes, "what postmodernism professes to have just discovered"—that historical study is vulnerable to "the fallibility and deficiency of the historical record; the fallibility and selectivity inherent in the writing of history; and the fallibility and subjectivity of the historian." Professor Himmelfarb herself has always known it. Victorian England is now "a civilization lost beyond recovery," she wrote in her first book, published in 1952. We must suppose "a past that was as complicated and varied as we know the present to be," she wrote in her fifth, published in 1984. But this gives no reason to abandon the hard work of professional history. In *On Looking into the Abyss,* her ninth book, Professor Himmelfarb demonstrates once again the possibilities offered to the historian with moral imagination and a modesty before the reality of the past.

A Very Modern Morality Tale

LIBERTY AND SEXUALITY: THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY AND THE MAKING OF ROE V. WADE. By DAVID J. GARROW. *MacMillan. 981 pp. $28.*

Reviewed by **Michael M. Uhlmann**

IT IS NOW twenty-one years since Harry Blackmun assaulted American constitutional jurisprudence with his opinion in *Roe v. Wade.* The Justice labored mightily only to produce an intellectual and moral embarrassment, one that will shadow him forever in much the same way and for much the same reason that *Dred Scott* haunts the reputation of Roger Taney.

Blackmun's opinion has not improved with age, nor have the years softened the harsh judgments that greeted it at the time of its deliverance. Indeed, few Supreme Court decisions have ever been the object of such instant and severe censure, much of it coming from those who were no particular friends of the unborn child. In this politically correct era, however, the decision had one redeeming feature: it reached the

MICHAEL M. UHLMANN *is an attorney now serving as a Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.*

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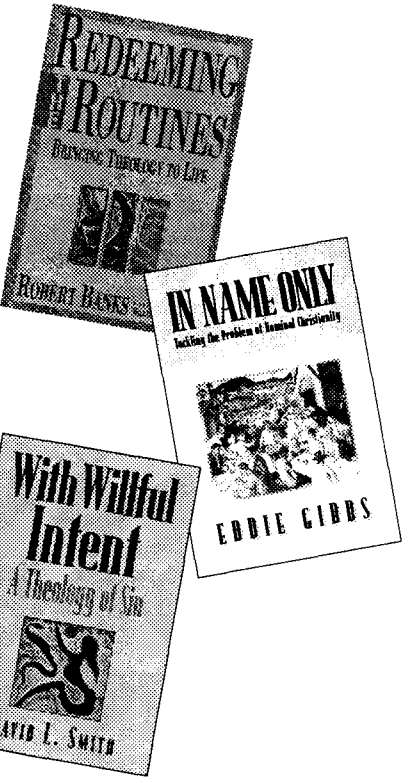

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fashionably acceptable result. Never mind that this grand achievement relied upon an almost willfully ignorant understanding of human biology and a moral rationale that would have embarrassed a Philosophy 101 student. And never mind that its constitutional raiment was a lawyer's version of the Emperor's New Clothes.

It would be too much to say that *Roe* caused a revolution in law or morals, but it certainly legitimated one. For what Blackmun and his supporting colleagues did was to read into the American Constitution a thoroughly modern metaphysic, one that celebrates individual autonomy as the summum bonum of civil society (provided, that is, you manage to get yourself born first). It may be doubted whether Blackmun and Co. understood the full implications of what they were doing; that is perhaps the kindest thing to be said for their efforts. They nevertheless effected a radical turn in the direction of American constitutional law. *Roe* was not the first, nor will it be the last, decision to lead us toward a jurisprudence of autonomous individualism, but it was (and is) a signal statement of that view, and as such, a radical turn from the moral principles of the founding.

David J. Garrow celebrates *Roe* precisely because it so dramatically advanced this new way of thinking about the source and character of individual rights. *Liberty and Sexuality* is his account of how abortion on demand came to enjoy the protection of the United States Constitution and of why Harry Blackmun's rationale for individual autonomy (especially in matters sexual) should be retained and expanded. He begins his tale with an exhaustive (and exhausting) battlefront diary of the thirty-year assault against Connecticut's archaic anti-birth control statute—an uncommonly foolish law of which the best that could be said is that it was enforced mostly by salutary neglect. Its foolishness, however, was a separate question from whether the federal judiciary ought to be the instrument of its invalidation and, if so, on what constitutional grounds. Innumerable silly, noxious, and even perverse laws dot the nation's statutory landscape, making life inconvenient (or worse) for all sorts of freedom-loving citizens. But to have federal judges roaming that territory as a kind of constitutional posse is frequently a cure worse than the disease. Wise judges have always understood the prudential and constitutional limits of the judicial writ in a democratic society and for that reason have picked their targets carefully.

No such prudential restraint deterred William O. Douglas and his colleagues when they nullified the

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Connecticut statute in 1965 in the *Griswold* case. That the law was held to be unconstitutional was less shocking than that the Court was unable to articulate a coherent rationale for its conclusion. Douglas, who wrote the lead opinion, composed a panegyric to privacy that he could not tether to any particular clause in the Constitution. But never mind, he found its source and justification in that ancient document's "penumbras" and "emanations," which because they are not limned in words have, shall we say, a certain useful plasticity. Since then, of course, the Court has discovered all sorts of other hitherto unobserved rights, the most prominent among these being the right to abortion on demand. It is to that subject that Garrow devotes the larger part of his book, offering what amounts to a backstairs history of the litigation strategy that eventually led to *Roe v. Wade*.

At Garrow's hand, the story unfolds as simple didactic drama for the already converted. Certainly none of his readers will have trouble differentiating the Good Guys from the Bad Guys: the Forces of Evil almost always wear Roman collars or their equivalent (or take orders from those who do), and appear to stay awake nights thinking up new and devilish ways to make life harsh for women. Though deeply entrenched, well-financed, and of course enormously powerful, these blackguards are nevertheless routed by a small but dedicated band of courageous, freedom-loving women and their equally virtuous allies, who appear to spend most of *their* time selflessly pursuing noble causes and making life more beautiful and meaningful for all Americans, especially the downtrodden.

IN SHORT, if you like your history neatly packaged so as not to disturb opinions inconsistent with, say, those of the *New York Times*, you will undoubtedly consider this book as a more or less definitive recounting. On the other hand, if you question the wisdom, justice, or constitutional pedigree of the jurisprudence celebrated by Garrow, the book will seem just another pamphlet—albeit a massive and sometimes elegant one—in the continuing cultural war about morality in general and sexual mores in particular.

Within the narrow ideological limits he has set for himself, Garrow weaves an interesting tale, although even his partisans might wish for a more abridged version. He has an eye for detail and for the ways in which personality brings life to otherwise dryasdust factual narrative. He appears to have interviewed everyone still breathing who had anything whatsoever to do with the events he chronicles, and has made good use of his access to judicial papers and former Supreme Court clerks.

Despite these technical virtues, however, Garrow's is at best a half-told tale. So strongly does he identify with the reformers that he never really asks why their efforts were—and continue to be—resisted. He is almost breathless in his recounting of the gritty determination of his mostly fashionable heroes and heroines, but never wonders why legalized abortion has riven this nation as few other issues in its history. Nor does he wonder why, twenty years after Harry Blackmun thought he had put the matter definitively to rest, the Supreme Court is still struggling for a coherent rationale to justify its original intervention. For a book that purports to be a comprehensive, if not definitive, account of sexual freedom and the law during the past half century, that is a rather significant shortcoming.

THIS FAILING is less a case of indifference or hostility, I think, than it is of moral tone deafness. In a work of nearly a thousand pages, Garrow never really takes seriously (and therefore never comes to terms with) the substance of the argument that was, and is, arrayed against the legalization of abortion. Although he

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otherwise provides mind-numbing detail at every turn, he is singularly incurious, for example, about the claims that can be made on behalf of the innocent creature he condemns to death in order to safeguard the pregnant woman's "privacy" rights. Garrow's camera focuses mainly on liberals talking with liberals about which strategy is most likely to succeed. He dutifully records colorful minutiae about their personal lives and recounts in detail their worries and disagreements. He seeks to extract such drama from these encounters as they will yield, but misses altogether the larger and more important drama that lies at the heart of the abortion controversy.

He seems wholly unacquainted, for example, with any argument that might be advanced on behalf of the unborn other than one deriving from Roman Catholic or other religious doctrine, and he does not pause to examine even those. He is similarly unacquainted with the vast literature on human embryology or fetology that makes so compelling a case for the humanity of the unborn child. He seems blissfully unaware, in short, that the occupant of a woman's womb might be considered as something other than a social inconvenience or a roadblock on the route to her achievement of personal autonomy. When Garrow listens to the womb, he hears only silence. In this, he unconsciously imitates the Court itself, which to this day proceeds on the fiction that only the pregnant woman has any rights worth worrying about.

That is why, perhaps, it is impossible for Garrow to imagine a principled opposition to the reformers whose lives he chronicles, who proceed as if an abortion were no more morally problematic than an appendectomy. As the feminists like to say about sexual harassment, Garrow "just doesn't get it." Try as he might to avert his gaze, however, something—to be more precise, someone—is killed during an abortion. That is why the legal revolution he celebrates in this book will always be sullied, in Shakespeare's words, with "black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct."

Hustling the Religious Product

SELLING GOD: AMERICAN RELIGION IN THE MARKETPLACE OF CULTURE. By R. LAURENCE MOORE. *Oxford University Press. 317 pp. $25.*

Reviewed by **Mark A. Noll**

IN HOLY WRIT, the conjunctions between authentic faith and the worlds of commerce are strangely varied: the Hebrew Scriptures contain much in the Pentateuch on the protection and use of property, but a dif-

MARK A. NOLL *is Professor of History at Wheaton College and author of* A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada *(Eerdmans).*

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ferent realm of existence is central to the prophets: "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Isaiah 55:1) In the words of Jesus, nothing could be stated more definitely than that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15) Yet from the selfsame authority we hear that the End of the Age can be compared to a man who chastises a servant for not putting "my money with the bankers" so that he could have "received what was my own with interest." (Matthew 25:27)

These biblical words do not directly answer modern questions about how to organize economies, nor do they provide the believer with easy guidelines to the practical conundrums thrown up for faith and morals by the need to live in a modern economic world. They do, however, show that biblical writers regarded economic and spiritual analysis as overlapping, and yet distinct, modes of reasoning.

R. Laurence Moore's *Selling God* is an extended historical meditation on religious experience in the United States, where, from the start, the two spheres of reasoning—religious and commercial—have occupied almost identical territory. The larger canvass of the book is Protestantism, which from its sixteenth-century beginnings Moore regards as "an exercise in efficiency and bureaucratic streamlining that appealed to Europe's commercial bourgeoisie." But the specific focus is the manifold ways in which the story of religion in the United States may be written as a story of "commodification." Moore, a veteran interpreter of American religion who teaches history at Cornell, states his thesis at the start or close of almost every chapter: secularization in America has never meant a zero-sum struggle in which the "world" and the "church" battle to control the same bit of turf. Rather, secularization has always been a much more nuanced reality, with the gains and losses for religion attending the same set of circumstances. It is "religion's systematic and expansive complicity in mechanisms of market exchange" that provides Moore his argument and dictates the arrangement of his evidence.

THIS STUDY is quite a bit more subtle than other recent books that have also featured the market orientation of American religion—like Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's *The Churching of America, 1776-1990,* which celebrates the struggle of denominations for "market share"; or Michael Scott Horton's *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism,* a bracing jeremiad bemoaning exactly what Moore describes. The subtlety in Moore's book comes from the recognition that in the United States, it could not have been any other way. A free society, which prohibits a state church and discourages most kinds of governmental assistance to religion—and a society, moreover, which, at least after the 1790s, organized itself in accordance with the reasoning of free markets—is a society where, as Moore puts it, "Either religion keeps up with other cultural aspects of national life, including the commercial forms, or it has no importance." The citizens of the United States "remained a religious people because religious leaders, and sometimes their opponents, found ways to make religion competitive with other cultural products." Put in these terms, the process Moore describes has an air of inevitability about it and so deserves to be explored before it is celebrated or condemned.

The fact that Moore himself admits to a "secular" standpoint actually helps to clarify his interpretations. Moore does comment more extensively on how commodification affects the ability to apprehend transcendence than his purportedly secular standpoint would lead readers to expect. But for the most part, he succeeds in treating the subject in terms of historical forces instead of divine reality—a strategy that, ironically, only sharpens the impact of his book on those who do believe.

If Moore comes close to overkill in repeating his thesis, his evidence is strikingly diverse. The book's first five chapters treat ways that nineteenth-century Protestants (with a concentration on circumstances before the Civil War) carried out the commodification of faith. The last four treat twentieth-century matters and expand coverage to Jews and Catholics, while also noting the very different forms of Protestantism that have emerged in this century. Throughout, Moore readily acknowledges the insights of earlier scholars on the particular topics he treats; his contribution is not so much fresh research as large-scale synthesis of individual themes that the burgeoning scholarship on American religious history has made available for such a purpose.

FOR THE nineteenth-century United States, Moore argues his thesis by examining salient examples of reli-

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gious-market interaction. He begins with activistic Protestants, led by the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society, who exploited new capacities for popular print to reach the country's rapidly expanding audience of readers. He then describes the way that urban revivalists adopted theatrical methods for their own tasks even as they combatted the evils of the stage. Moore shows how the Protestant mobilization for evangelism and reform provided models for the organization of America's first political parties and then outlines ways in which political salesmanship may have doubled back to influence the churches. He reviews the tangled story of why Protestants first resisted the exploitation of leisure but then became earnest advocates in market competition for leisure time. This section closes by examining the way that Protestant leaders self-consciously used religious controversy to "sell" their distinct beliefs and also to distribute books and periodicals, market their meetings, finance their church buildings, and meet budgets.

Moore's case studies provide intriguing vignettes: from the instincts of Washington biographer Mason Weems, who was almost as capable a salesman for the idea of lively, dramatic, popular literature as he was a seller of such works himself; through the reluctant accommodation of evangelical Protestants to the idea that fiction and the visual arts could be enlisted for religious purposes; to the way in which republican civic humanism worked to inspire audience-oriented market thinking for both Protestant reform societies and the great political parties of the antebellum period. But his overarching conclusion is more important: even to have a chance at preserving a substantial place for religion in American society at a time when most European nations were witnessing steady decline in religious adherence, the question was not whether Americans would market their faith but how.

The arguments of the second half of the book may not be quite as compelling, since (as Moore recognizes) immigration, splits within denominations, and adaptability to modern realities have led to a tremendous diversity in religion throughout the United States. Still, by focusing on mainstream liberal Protestants identified with the Federal and National Councils of Churches, the Protestant evangelicals who have most aggressively exploited the popular media, and those Catholics and Jews who have participated most visibly in popular culture, Moore sustains his argument down to the present.

FOR THE late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he shows how the Chautauqua movement brought together into a seamless whole an unlikely combination of traditional Protestant uplift and equally traditional Protestant suspicion of organized holidays. As a counterpart Moore suggests that working Americans, especially the growing numbers of Roman Catholics, made their own adaptations of religion to laborers' needs in ways that were neither as orderly as contemporary religious leaders hoped nor as filled with bad faith as later Marxist interpreters contended.

The book closes with strong chapters examining full-scale liberal Protestant commitment to the big-time advertising of the 1920s and the similarly unreserved exploitation of television and radio by evangelicals in the last half century. In these chapters, Moore is very hard on the liberal Protestants, especially for

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The conference will explore certain moral issues in international politics which have come into clearer focus with the end of the Cold War, especially as these relate to the nature and limits of state sovereignty. Featured speakers will be Justin Cooper, (Political Science, Redeemer College); John Hare (Philosophy, Calvin College); Daniel Philpott and J. Bryan Hehir (Government, Harvard University); Jean Bethke Elshtain (University of Chicago); James Turner Johnson (Religion, Rutgers University); and Paul Marshall (Political Phil, ICS). In his keynote address, George Weigel (Ethics & Public Policy Center) will focus on the role of the United States in this post-Cold War era in international politics. Respondents will include James Skillen, Vigen Guroian, David Lumsdaine, Alberto Coll, and Fr. Alexander Webster.

For more details contact: The Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 (616)957-7162; e-mail:millk@calvin.edu.

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their painstaking efforts to remove the inconveniences of faith. In this context, Moore summarizes Reinhold Niebuhr's complaint about Protestant liberalism: "The problem was that they had exchanged the emotional fervor of Christianity, its deep and moving feeling for the terrible burden of human depravity, for a breezy faith in efficiency." And he says of efforts by the Federal and National Councils of Churches to retain free air time by accommodating to the wishes of the networks and the Federal Communications Commission: "The effort not to antagonize an audience (listeners after all only had to turn the dial) seemed a strange extrapolation from the life of a crucified Christ." For some reason, Moore expresses warmer feelings toward the evangelical entrepreneurs of radio and television who, in their own way, have out-liberaled the liberals in orienting their message to what could pay.

In a revealing epilogue, Moore tries to take the sting out of a book that could be read as a massive indictment of the churches. What we have seen in the United States is new, Moore argues, only as it represents a new way of brokering the accommodations that have always occurred between church and world. "Although the nature of organized religion's 'secularity' has changed in the past two hundred years," he says, "that . . . is not by itself a reason for scandalized outcry." "The particular form of worldliness that churches in the United States have exhibited by entering the marketplace of culture has only displaced earlier forms of church worldliness: direct political involvement in the domestic and foreign policy of states, conspicuous displays of non-bourgeois pomp and wealth, and heavy investment in the higher forms of philosophical and scientific knowledge."

But despite a great capacity to treat such matters analytically, and with much deference to the ongoing spiritual mission of religious groups, Moore cannot hide his alarm as the book draws to a close. He asks where religious bodies will obtain "transformative power"—where they will find "the paradigm-busters" and "the real religious prophets"—if the churches are so thoroughly integrated into the system that the effort to market consumes their whole vision.

This provocative book raises, but does not itself answer, several vitally important questions. First, it draws attention to the more general worldwide context in which religious bodies now struggle to exist. That context may be put in the form of a conundrum: from the experience of the last two centuries it would seem to be the case that for churches to engage without reserve in the world of laissez faire markets is to lose their souls (mostly the experience of the liberal West); on the other hand, for societies to seek an alternative to laissez faire economic organization is to destroy bodies along with souls, for churches and individuals alike (mostly the experience of the communist East and the tribal South). For churches in the West, the spiritual lesson of *Selling God* would seem to be that there is no point in opting out of the market relationships that define such a vast proportion of western life. At the same time, opting in must be regarded as a dangerous matter where the stakes, as stated long ago, are ultimate: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 5:21)

A second effect of Moore's book is to raise curiosity about other ways of organizing religion that have embodied alternatives to the commodification of faith. Historically, these alternatives have included primarily varieties of established religion and of radical sectarianism. Neither of these alternatives is flourishing today. The Roman Catholic Church is the prime instance of a body that once insisted upon the principle of establishment, but now increasingly acknowledges the importance of freedom in the choice and expression of religion. Sectarianism (at least of the sort that abandons market concerns) also seems like an increasingly difficult road to pursue in a world so insistently networked as the globe has become at the end of the twentieth century. Yet it may be that seasonings of an establishment mind, or hints of sectarian subversion, may still retain some potency and, if pursued by religions in the marketplace, may enable believers to sell their wares with more integrity than otherwise might be the case.

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FINALLY, almost despite himself, Moore pushes believers to a fresh evaluation of the "product." In the end, if what churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious organizations have *may* be marketed, then there is no purpose in wringing one's hands if it *is* marketed. But there is every need to see clearly what is going on, and to strive valiantly against simply equating the marketable with the real. One of Moore's most provocative assertions heightens the issue: "Religion in the marketplace of culture has become an *ordinary* commodity. It might seem a high-class product or a low-class product, just like automobiles and cheeses. Jim Bakker is Velveeta; Norman Vincent Peale is sliced Swiss in plastic wrap; Reinhold Niebuhr is Brie. Without an official role to play, religion's power lies in what can be claimed through advertising. Conservative evangelicals and liberal Protestants are essentially doing the same thing. Imitation breeds imitation, and so it will go into the future." In these terms, everything hinges on the implications of the word "ordinary."

A Scientist's Credo

THE FAITH OF A PHYSICIST: REFLECTIONS OF A BOTTOM-UP THINKER. By JOHN POLKINGHORNE. *Princeton University Press. 205 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by **Ted Peters**

A CREDO. A summary of faith-reason commitments. A mini-systematic theology. *The Faith of a Physicist* by Cambridge physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne is a compendium of conclusions drawn from decades of dialogue between natural science and Christian theology. Based on his 1993-94 Gifford Lectures, Polkinghorne's task here is to ask challenging questions of the contemporary scientific worldview and to show how the range of possible answers carries us beyond biology to spirit and beyond physics to God. He calls this a "bottom-up" method. The "bottoms" with which he begins include scientific data regarding the natural world, historical data regarding the biography of Jesus, and the like. The "up" with which he concludes is a high degree of confidence regarding the fundamental commitments of the Christian faith, commitments that in his view are completely compatible with the truths pursued in the field of science.

Steadfast in affirming that epistemology models ontology, Polkinghorne takes as his point of departure the Nicene Creed's affirmation of faith, "We believe." Here he sets his methodological compass and follows it toward the God-world relation in terms of creation, incarnation, sanctification, and eschatological redemption.

First, faith. Faith is not merely a polite expression for unsubstantiated assertion, not an excuse for believing in God as an irrational act. Rather, faith and reason belong together. Both reflect the quest for truth. Truth-seeking is something shared by scientists and theologians alike. "Although faith goes beyond what is logically demonstrable," he writes, "yet it is capable of rational motivation." "Christians do not have to close their minds, nor are they faced with the dilemma of having to choose between ancient faith and modern knowledge. They can hold both together."

Methodologically, Polkinghorne is committed to *consonance*—that is, theological reflection on creation must be consonant with what science says about the Big Bang and evolution. This by no means requires that theological assertions be reducible to scientific assertions. The scientific worldview is itself subject to interrogation and expansion, and this is pursued through metaphysics.

NONE OF US can do without metaphysics, he observes, and then admonishes us to do metaphysics deliberately. Rejecting Cartesian dualism in favor of what he calls "dual-aspect monism," Polkinghorne opens biology to the existence of supra-physical consciousness or spirit; and he opens physics to a reality that transcends the world of the Big Bang and the evolution of conscious life. At this point extrapolation and speculation from a scientific basis ceases. Polkinghorne then turns to orthodox Christian commitments—such as a theistic understanding of God and *creatio ex nihilo*—and defends them against competing positions.

For example, he distinguishes his position from the deism implied in the proposals of Stephen Hawking and other physicists regarding the onset of the Big Bang with its possible edge of time at the beginning, the implication of which is that creation is presumed to be limited to a single act at the beginning. From

TED PETERS *is Professor of Systematic Theology at Pacific Lutheran Seminary and Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.*

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then on God supposedly lets nature take its evolutionary course. But Polkinghorne is a theist who believes in an active God, so he combines *creatio ex nihilo* with *creatio continua* to emphasize God's continuing involvement in nature. Polkinghorne's active God is omnipotent, but is by no means a tyrant. God's power has been withheld to make room for freedom within nature, and God still acts in nature without obviating this freedom. "One is trying to steer a path between the unrelaxing grip of a Cosmic Tyrant and the impotence or indifference of a Deistic Spectator."

Then, looking in the other direction, Polkinghorne distinguishes his position from the panentheism of process theology, because the latter fails to provide sufficient grounds for hope. The Whiteheadian God can very well share our suffering, but there is no eschatological guarantee here that evil will be overcome. "I do not want to be just a fly in the amber of divine remembrance," Polkinghorne writes. "I look forward to a destiny and a continuing life beyond death. To put it bluntly, the God of process theology does not seem to be the God who raised Jesus from the dead."

Our Revelationary Age, the Prophecies for WWIII and the Year 2000

by Helen Tzima Otto, Ph.D.

A thorough analysis of several hundreds of individual prophecies, spanning millennia, which predict with amazing detail the great perils and promises of our proximate future. Through Biblical, historical, linguistic and politico-economic research, Our Revelationary Age...establishes that the year 2000 AD marks neither the advent of the Antichrist nor the end of the world, but the dawn of an era of peace. (526 pages, voluminous bibliography, index).

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I WONDER IF this defense of theism, as clear and forceful as it is, actually needs the discussion of science. It seems to me that this classic debate between deists, theists, and panentheists is only *occasioned* by issues rising out of Big Bang physics. The physics itself does not actually influence the direction, let alone determine the destination, of the debate as we find it in Polkinghorne. The pursuit of consonance seems to be set aside at this point.

Polkinghorne wants a reason for hope. He finds the reason to hope in the Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ that anticipates the eschatological resurrection yet to come. Over against various forms of evolutionary optimism, he states that "Our hope lies not in an encouragement to make more of the potentialities of present process, but in a call to participate *in Christ* in that eschatological transformation constituting the new creation, which is to grow from the seminal event of his resurrection." Big Bang cosmology—regardless of whether the universe expands forever and dies a fiery death or contracts due to gravity and destroys itself in the Big Crunch—offers no hope. Our only hope lies in a future eschatological act by God. Physical cosmology can tell us about present natural processes; only faith can tell us that there is reason to expect God to act in the future.

Most fascinating to this reader is Polkinghorne's lengthy discussion of time and eternity. The classic understanding of eternity as timelessness is not good enough for him, whether applied to divine knowledge or to eschatology. With regard to divine knowledge, God cannot know the future in advance. All events are not concurrent in eternity. What happens temporally counts. Eschatologically, the new creation will not utterly destroy and replace the present creation. The new creation, Polkinghorne says, will not be *ex nihilo*, but rather *ex vetere*—that is, it will be what the Holy Spirit does to the first creation. Therefore, the eternity of the divine life must include a temporal component. I agree. One consequence of this line of argumentation, of course, is that it takes us back to panentheism, albeit an eschatological panentheism.

Because *The Faith of a Physicist* is organized like a systematic theology and comes at this stage in Polkinghorne's scholarly career, it is safe to say that this is the single most important work of his theological corpus. All his previous commitments are repeated and summarized here. So also his willingness to define his position sharply against panentheistic colleagues in the field such as Arthur Peacocke and Ian Barbour. The strength of Peacocke and Barbour is perhaps that they wrestle more thoroughly with the relevant scientific ideas and seek a fuller integration with theological ideas. The strength of Polkinghorne is his confidence that the Christian faith, when subjected to the same rational scrutiny that science exacts upon its data and theories, exhibits an honest pursuit of truth accompanied by a confidence in its rational motivation.

Tender Mercies

DEAR JAMES. By JON HASSLER. *Ballantine Books. 438 pp. $21.*

***Reviewed by* Philip Zaleski**

SOME WRITERS capture national headlines; others capture local hearts. This observation was brought delightfully home to me a few months ago, when I dropped a small pile of books on the checkout

PHILIP ZALESKI *teaches literature at Wesleyan University and religion at Smith College.*

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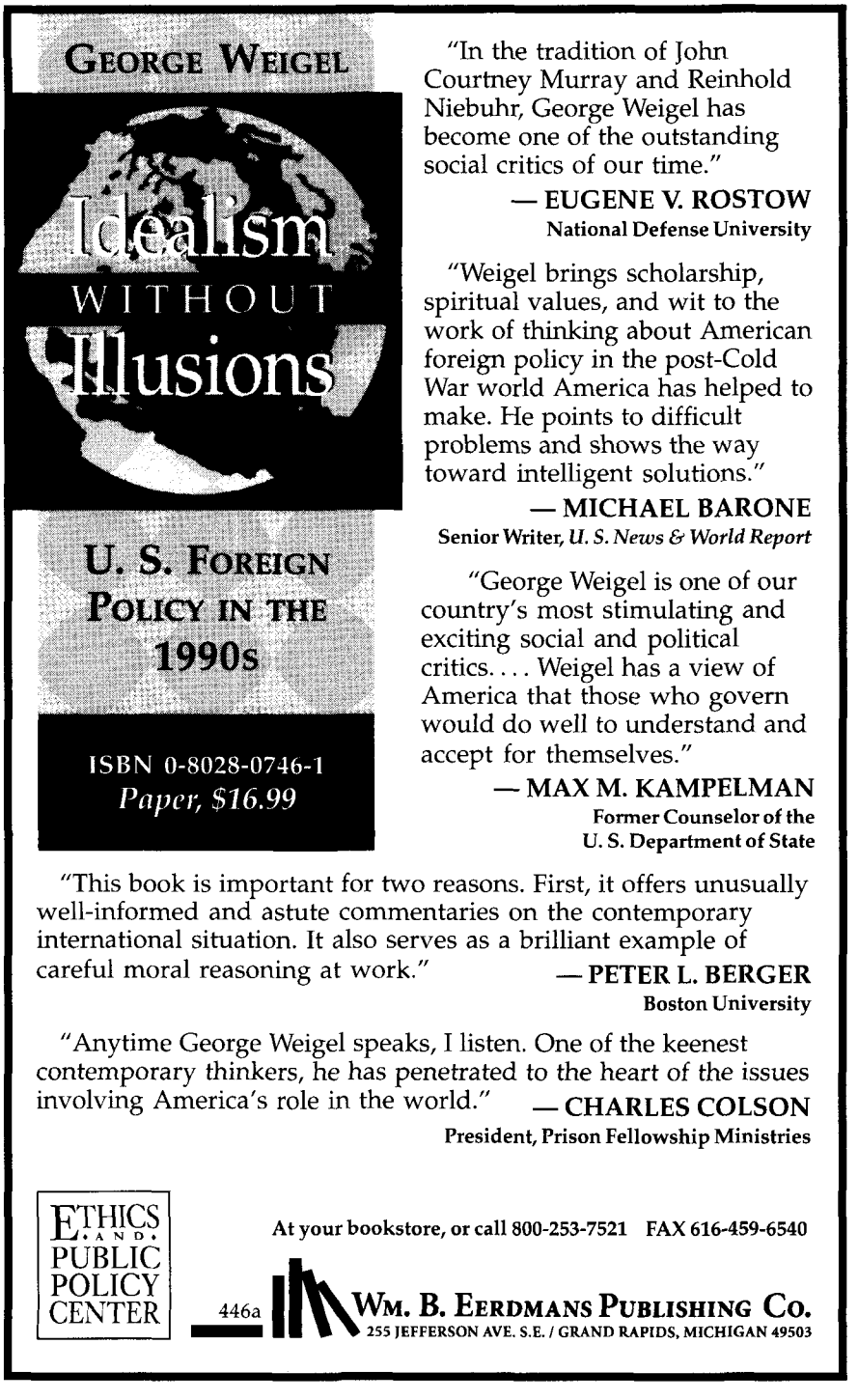
desk at my neighborhood public library. The librarian working the computer screen, a small, quiet woman of monastic disposition, usually goes about her chores without uttering a word. This time, however, she accepted my stack, glanced at the top book, and burst into a smile broad enough to launch a moon rocket. "Jon Hassler!" she yelped. The smiled widened as she saw that, in fact, my entire selection that day consisted of Hassler novels. "Isn't he just great!" she said. "I wish there were more like him. A writer that makes you glad to be alive."

Who, you might wonder, is this man who gladdens the hearts of young librarians, middle-aged professors, and, I am told, droves of retirees? The author of seven novels, beginning in 1977 with *Staggerford* (the imaginary Minnesota town where most of his stories unfold), Hassler is a writer-in-residence and English teacher at St. John's University, Minnesota. In a recent interview, he confesses that the writing takes precedence: "My teaching is always in the late afternoon or evening. The students get me when my mind is shot!"—a decision that even his students must applaud considering the literary fruit that results, lately in his newest novel, *Dear James*.

Dear James brings back characters from Hassler's earlier ventures, most notably Miss Agatha McGee, the elementary school principal who loomed so large in *Staggerford* and *A Green Journey* (1985). Agatha, now seventy, radiates that quality that used to be called "spine": moral rectitude, dogged courage, and a trap-door mind fused into a backbone strong enough to shoulder the problems of half of Staggerford. She has her faults, too; having "always striven to be predictable," she finds herself adrift after the closing of her beloved St. Isidore's Elementary, an event symptomatic, in her worried eyes, of the shutting down of Christendom. Around Agatha's moral axis revolve, frequently in erratic orbit, the members of Staggerford's closely knit Catholic community: French Lopat, the Vietnam vet who scratches out a living as a fake Indian for the tourist trade; Lillian, Agatha's best friend, who gets her news from supermarket tabloids; Imogene, Lillian's daughter, a liar and backstabber; Sister Judith, a New Age nun who imagines the Creation as God laying a giant egg.

IN THIS CONSTELLATION of superbly drawn comic characters, the brightest star is the one farthest away: Father James O'Hannon, an Irish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parish priest in Ballybegs, Ireland, with whom Agatha has carried on a correspondence—blossoming into platonic love—for years. Thus the salutation of the title; its irony lies in James' failure, for the first several years of their relationship, to inform Agatha of his clerical status. After she discovered the truth during their only face-to-face encounter (a debacle recounted in *A Green Journey*) the correspondence entered a new phase. As *Dear James* opens, Agatha continues to write long, revelatory letters to James, and then instantly tears them up. Meanwhile, James' undammed stream of letters to her stagnates in her desk.

Despite their estrangement, Agatha thinks constantly of James, and he of her. Their relationship is platonic in more than the conventional sense; these two traditionalists share a respect for ideas and a belief in Ideas, even in the Logos. Similarly, their correspondence is more than epistolary; their lives run along parallel tracks, in religion, intellect, and morals. The joy of the book lies in watching these lines converge into a happy ending despite the obstacles of age, location, and vocation. Before this dignified conclusion, however, Agatha and James must not only reconcile with one another, but atone for the past by surrendering a grudge: he against the British who killed his father sixty years ago; she against Imogene, the acid-tongued gossip who makes public her correspondence with James. In local communities, Hassler suggests, ancient truths abide: words retain their power to save or ruin lives, good and evil can yet be distinguished, people remain accountable for their acts, and sin, penance, and absolution are still valid coin of the realm.

REMARKABLY—this is where Hassler parts company with almost all other American novelists—religion is the means whereby these small-town transformations take place. In *Dear James*, the catalyst is not only the teachings of the Church but its sacred places as well. Agatha and James heal their breach in the Vatican (she is there on a New Year's tour of Italy), a small town that is a universal city. They deepen their accord in Assisi, another small town whose essence Hassler captures as well as any writer before him. Most strikingly of all, James renews his priestly mission during a papal audience at the Vatican. The critical moment comes when John Paul II, working his way down the center aisle, halts in front of James (who is standing on a chair for a better view), gazes into his eyes for "a full five seconds," and then gestures him forward.

> James lowered himself carefully to the floor, and the crowd made room for him at the barrier. John Paul stepped forward, took James' face in his hands, turned it to the left and spoke briefly into his ear. Then he bent forward and touched his forehead to James' forehead, his hands still cupping James' face like a precious vessel. Then he moved on.

To find out what the Pope whispered, read the book. Suffice it here to repeat Agatha's assessment that "we've just witnessed a miracle," not in the sense of an impossible happening, but in the sense of a revelation of the eternal sacred moral order in the temporal fallen human order.

These Staggerfordian trials and redemptions add up to more than a series of Sunday School lessons. One feels a great moral force surging through this novel, a sense that lives do indeed matter, that God oversees the comedy—and that fiction is the right means to get this message across. As James puts it, "Stories can move people, Agatha. I learned that in the pulpit. You can preach till the cows come home and not awaken a single soul, but the right story, well told, goes straight to the heart." It brings to mind a passage from John Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*, an important, vilified, and now forgotten book of the 1970s. "The traditional view," Gardner writes, "is that art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not to debase it. It seeks to hold off, at least for a while, the twilight of the gods and us."

Gardner's definition of traditional art describes perfectly Hassler's novels: creations as admirable for their benevolence as for their architecture. Here is an author who embraces every character his imagination conjures up, whether heroine, fool, heretic, or shrew. He is fulfilling Chekhov's dictum that "it is the writer's business not to accuse and not to prosecute, but to champion the guilty, once they are condemned and suffer punishment." Agatha, James, and nearly all of Hassler's figures suffer chastisement or worse for their failures, and nearly all are championed in this splendid work, testimony to God's tender mercies.

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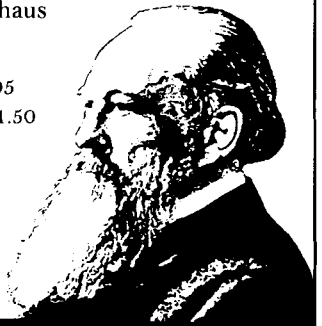

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On Power: The Natural History of its Growth. By Bertrand de Jouvenel. *Liberty Press. 444 pp. $25 cloth, $8.50 paper.*

Liberty Fund's tradition of publishing handsome and inexpensive volumes on liberty is enriched by this twentieth-century classic of political theory. Jouvenel chronicles with concern the growth of "Power"—the bureaucratic apparatus of the state which coalesced around kings in early modern Europe. In his account, aristocrats emerge as the champions of liberty, and democratic popular sovereignty is analyzed as an instrument that dangerously advances Power's monopoly of social authority. Yet Jouvenel is no simplistic libertarian. Indeed, he ends this work with an attack on rationalist individualism, a classical liberal postulate that has only abetted the growth of Power. He writes that historically, liberal metaphysics "refused to see in society anything but the state and the individual." "It disregarded the role of the spiritual authorities and of all those intermediate social forces which enframe, protect, and control the life of man"—and which thereby check the growth of Power. Jouvenel's political science may supply the discussion of intermediate authority that is neglected in the contemporary communitarian critique of liberalism.

— Mark C. Henrie

Memoirs. By Frederick C. Copleston, S.J. *Sheed & Ward. 228 pp. $14.95 paper.*

Father Copleston's nine-volume *History of Philosophy* seems destined to be one of the enduring intellectual achievements of the twentieth century by reason of its comprehensiveness, if not its scintillating readability. Alas, it is the lack of the latter that also characterizes Copleston's autobiography. Copleston does tell several good stories: about his monumental labors in composing the *History* with no secretarial or research assistance, for example, and about debating A. J. Ayer on the BBC while both men were mildly potted on pre-lunch whiskies. There is also the occasional *bon mot*; my favorite is this Coplestonian admonition: "When lecturing in Germany, one ought always to include some unintelligible passages if one hopes to escape the charge of having treated one's subject superficially and without depth." But the late philosopher's recollections of his conversion to Catholicism and of his Jesuit training during pre-conciliar days are uninformative and in fact rather dull. Nor does Copleston, who spent half the academic year at the Gregorian university in Rome prior to and during Vatican II, give us any insight into the intellectual ferment that shaped that decisive event in contemporary Catholic history. Copleston's colleague Bernard Lonergan, for example, is relegated to two brief paragraphs, one of which notes that, with Lonergan's arrival at the Gregorianum, "the Germans no longer enjoyed a monopoly of obscure profundity." In brief, the book is a disappointment, indeed something of a sadness. It does slight justice to Father Copleston's own achievements as a historian of philosophy to whom students have been indebted for generations.

— George Weigel

A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. By Mark A. Noll. *Eerdmans. 576 pp. $39.95 cloth, $29.95 paper.*

A comprehensive religious history of the U.S. and Canada from the earliest European settlement to the present, written by a frequent contributor to this journal. The combination of solid scholarship and literary grace was recognized by *Christianity Today* in its 1993 book awards: Noll's *History* was cited as both a Critics Choice Award and a Readers' Poll winner in the history and biography category. We find no reason to gainsay that judgment.

The History of Freedom. By John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton. With an Introduction by James C. Holland. *Acton Institute. 93 pp. $7.95 paper.*

John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, better known simply as Lord Acton, is most often remembered for

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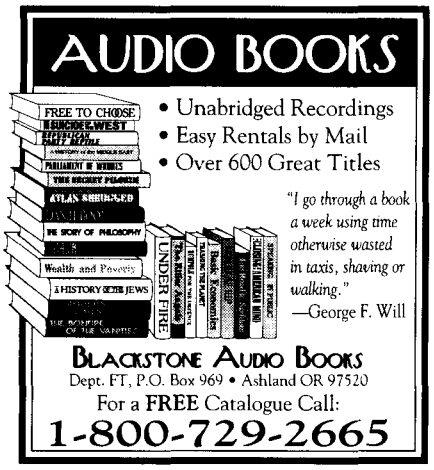
his frequently quoted observation that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." But Acton's writings on politics are full of rich and subtle insights, aphoristic and otherwise. The two essays in this volume—"The History of Freedom in Antiquity" and "The History of Freedom in Christianity"—are most welcome, and can be recommended highly.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THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE BELOVED SON: THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHILD SACRIFICE IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY. By JON D. LEVENSON. *Yale University Press. 257 pp. $27.50.*

A scholarly exploration of a neglected bond between Jews and Christians: the importance of the sacrificed son, from Abraham to Golgatha. At the same time, the idea of the last-born son superseding the earlier poses problems of Christian "supersessionism" with respect to Judaism. A valuable contribution to serious Jewish-Christian dialogue.

BRINGING UP A MORAL CHILD: A NEW APPROACH FOR TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO BE KIND, JUST, AND RESPONSIBLE. By MICHAEL SCHULMAN and EVA MEKLER. *Doubleday. 438 pp. $14.95 paper.*

Published a decade ago to considerable acclaim for all the wrong reasons, this book, in its revised edition, continues to be the perfect manual for rearing politically correct bigots who dismiss as bigots all with whom they disagree. The authors judgmentally rail against the judgmentalism of religion, while graciously allowing that some religious leaders have opposed the evils engendered by religion. Schulman is at Columbia while Mekler is a psychologist with the New York City Board of Education, a celebrated font of wisdom regarding moral education.

GAY POLITICS VS. COLORADO: THE INSIDE STORY OF AMENDMENT 2. By STEPHEN BRANSFORD. *Sardis Press (Box 11, Cascade CO 80809). 289 pp. $22.*

A remarkably calm and revealing account of the battle over "gay rights" in Colorado that captured national attention. Although written by a supporter of Amendment 2 (which was overturned by the court in a decision now on appeal), the book provides a convincing analysis of the crosscutting interests and passions engaged when citizens attempt to hold government democratically accountable. Since similar battles continue to be waged in other states, this account is of interest far beyond the borders of Colorado.

GEORGE MACDONALD: VICTORIAN MYTHMAKER. By ROLLAND HEIN. *Star Song (Nashville). 453 pp. $22.99.*

Hein is professor of literature at Wheaton College and here offers the first full-length biography of a writer who had an inestimable influence on such as C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkein, and Frederick Buechner (who writes the foreword). MacDonald was an extraordinary and often eccentric Scot who passionately embraced the Christian "myth" as the truth about a universal human destiny. An immensely popular writer in his time, his work is now, in large part via Lewis, enjoying something of a revival, richly deserved.

PUTTING AWAY CHILDISH THINGS. By UTA RANKE-HEINEMANN. *HarperSan Francisco. 306 pp. $24.*

With offerings such as this (and there are many like it) from Harper San Francisco, Paul Kurtz and his Atheist Society can shut down their Prometheus Press. The author "exposes how the myths behind the Church's key doctrines—such as the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the empty tomb—distort Jesus' real liberating message." What won't they think of next? The book is excitedly cheered by the usual claque, including Karen Armstrong (*A History of God*), Elisabeth Shüssler Fiorenza of Harvard, and, to be sure, Bishop John Spong. Readers with a sense of history may remember when such "radical religious thought" was radical.

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Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940. By George Chauncey. *Basic Books. 478 pp. $25.*

A University of Chicago historian sets out to explode the myth that before the homosexual movement that began in the late 1960s homosexuals were a closeted, fear-ridden, persecuted minority. In New York especially, but also in other metropolises, there was a large, flourishing, and frequently very public gay world that was tolerated, sometimes celebrated, by the surrounding society. According to Chauncey, a more negative view of homosexuality developed after World War II, when sexual deviance was viewed as an offense against The Great American Way of Life that was then uncritically celebrated. (He is working on a sequel that will bring the story up to 1975.) John Boswell of Yale, the noted gay apologist, hails the present volume as an "electrifying account" of urban homosexuality prior to "gay liberation as a social movement." The historically literate, however, will hardly be surprised by the existence of a homosexual subculture in earlier decades. It is precisely the emergence of gay liberation as a social movement determined to restructure society's laws and mores that has made homosexuality a subject of such intense controversy in our time. *Gay New York* is not so much electrifying as it is a very detailed confirmation of the obvious.

Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister. By Edith L. Blumhofer. *Eerdmans. 431 pp. $14.95 paper.*

In the 1920s "Sister" was as big as religious celebrities get. A rough and individualistic Protestant gospel joined with superb showmanship elicited (her critics say exploited) the religious passions of millions of Americans. This sympathetic biography provides entree to a time of religious excitements and confusions not entirely unlike our own.

As If

(Psalm 73)

Here's a picture of the bad ones I once envied:

Everything came easily: they did not need
To work to make their living, want
A catchy line, an angle to find lovers or companions
At the dining table: tan and fit from laps and basking
Poolside, they order drinks and gaze at the deep sky,
Chuckle at the devil, protest unjust god:
Superstitions meant for dimlit losers.
They eat the land bare, suck the ocean
Dry as though they had it in their goblet, tall
And frosted, with their tongues tips swish
Strong currents of the deep.
If I painted
Such a picture for you once, just feeling
Without understanding that I envied
Not another person but a creature of my dreams,
Then my mind would curdle, heart dry up
And I'd have been the dream beast I invented.
But the real touched me, cool and smooth,
Taught me to be able to have everything,
Need nothing, like the names of things
That are not you and are not those things
Either, in a picture story song.

Laurance Wieder

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

Never Again?

For most people in the West it is possibly the case that the only absolutely unambiguous icon of evil is the Third Reich and the Holocaust. One may argue that there are other instances of evil that should have that status in the popular consciousness, but they don't. It is therefore understandable that we continue to make moral discernments by employing Nazism as an absolute test line separating the discussable from the unspeakable. A new book from Oxford represents such an exercise in discernment, Stefan Kühl's *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*. It is a short (160 pp.), assiduously documented, and devastating account of the way in which American scientists admired and abetted Nazi schemes of racial eugenics in the 1930s, and how they changed their stories and tried to cover their tracks after 1945 when the full dimensions of the Nazi horror became more widely known.

Kühl's is a necessary reminder of how very liberal and progressive the advocacy of eugenics was thought to be in the first half of this century. Negative eugenics, the elimination of the "unfit," and positive eugenics, the breeding of "superior stock," were both greatly favored by the enlightened of the day. Even before the Nazis came to power, German scientists and politicians declared their indebtedness to the inspiring example of America's pioneering programs of sterilizing the mentally deficient and criminally prone. The American example is favorably cited in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and in the 1930s he wrote admiring letters to prominent American scientists who fully reciprocated his sentiments. Oliver Wendell Holmes had written in a notorious court decision that "three generations of imbeciles is enough," and it was this "realistic" approach of the Americans that German writers lifted up in unfavorable contrast to what they criticized as the dilatory ways of German scientists and policy makers. Come the Third Reich and the world would learn the new meaning of realism.

The leaders of some of the most distinguished universities and research institutions in America were ardently courted by the Nazis. The 550th anniversary of the University of Heidelberg in 1936 was marked by the bestowing of honorary doctorates on prominent American eugenicists, including Foster Kennedy, a psychiatrist and major figure in the Euthanasia Society of the United States until he broke with the society because it was squeamish about advocating the involuntary and systematic extermination of the mentally and physically unfit. In the eyes of a good many American scientists, the Germans would become the model of a rational determination that refused to be inhibited by sentimental concern for the weak who were allegedly jeopardizing the future of the race.

As useful as Kühl's study is, there are disappointing omissions and moments of curious reticence. One suspects that Kühl, a German academic, was too well coached by some of the American advisers whom he thanks in his introduction. In any event, he steers clear of the turbulent waters surrounding some of the contemporary questions most pertinent to his subject. By organizing his interpretation around scientists and "American racism," he severely narrows the focus to include chiefly those scientists who espoused theories that today we would call racist. When it comes to commenting on the contemporary significance of his story, this leaves him with a handful of villains on the kooky margins of scientific and political discourse. His own account makes it clear, however, that most of the American scientists and public policy experts involved were too savvy to make an explicitly racialist argument for eugenics. While racial overtones were almost everywhere present, the formal advocacy was usually framed in terms of the fitness or unfitness not of racial groups but of individuals.

Then too, there is no attention paid the campaign for birth and population control during the period

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studied. Margaret Sanger, the patron saint of Planned Parenthood, is not mentioned even once, although her views (often explicitly racial) closely paralleled those of the eugenicists, and the organizations pressing this common agenda had overlapping leadership and coordinated programs. One might leave the Kühl book with the impression that the story he relates has little to do with today, except for some fringe racists and some generalized cautions about the moral obtuseness of scientific expertise. In fact, today's disputes over abortion, euthanasia, fetal experimentation, and population control are on a continuum with the scientific culture of death examined by Stefan Kühl. He does, almost in passing, note the extraordinary role of the Rockefeller Foundation in pushing the eugenics agenda from the start. Rockefeller funded numerous conferences and research projects that were a great boost to Nazi-American collaboration, and the role of the foundation was generously appreciated by the Germans for giving their efforts international respectability.

Today Rockefeller is joined by Ford, MacArthur, and other megaphilanthropies that, together with a number of Western governments, pour hundreds of millions of dollars per year into promoting sterilization, abortion, and other measures aimed at limiting the fecundity of the poor and disadvantaged. All of this is done under the rubric of "population control," but it is in fact a massive exercise in negative eugenics. The racial, cultural, and economic presuppositions undergirding it are usually thinly disguised, and sometimes openly admitted. As Nicholas Eberstadt's thorough examination demonstrates (First Things, January 1994), population control is ideology disguised as science. There is no scientific measure of "overpopulation," but there is a powerful and ideologically driven dread of lesser breeds that threaten our advantaged way of life and, presumably, the planetary balance.

We Americans are given to smugly assuring ourselves that "It can't happen here." And of course the full horror of something like the Third Reich has not happened here and, God willing, will not. What has happened here, as Stefan Kühl so trenchantly demonstrates, is that many of the "brightest and best" of the American scientific and public policy community warmly endorsed the ideas, and some of the practices, that gave the world the Holocaust. After 1945 they drew back in repugnance from the consequences of their ideas but, with slight semantic changes, they continued and they continue to advance the same ideas. One of the prosecutors at Nuremberg explained how people could act so savagely: "There is only one step to take. You may not think it possible to take it; but I assure you that men I thought decent men did take it. You have only to decide that one group of human beings have lost their human rights." As a polity, the United States has long since taken that step with respect to unborn children. The proponents of euthanasia urge upon us further steps in deciding that those who cannot effectively assert their rights have no rights. At Nuremberg the prosecution argued that the killing programs unfolded quite predictably from one thing to another, that the killing of the six-millionth Jew was set in motion by the morphine overdose given the first harelipped child.

Most of us rebel against the drawing of any analogies between ourselves and the Nazis. That is understandable. The rebellion is rooted in part in our conceit that we are not capable of such great evil. It is rooted also in an entirely reasonable appreciation of the differences between our circumstance—culturally, politically, economically—and that of Germany in the 1930s. But our perception of reality is distorted by making Nazism the test of evil. It is as though we can comfort ourselves that "it" is not happening here because there is no American Auschwitz and nobody is proposing the extermination of millions of Jews, gypsies, and others officially classified as subhuman.

So we allow, and even provide government subsidy for, the killing of 1.6 million unborn children each year. That, we are told, is no analogy with the Nazis because they prohibited abortion, at least for the socially desirable. So, moreover, it is open season for fetal experimentation, fetal farming, and the use of aborted corpses for transplants. That, we are told, is not comparable to doing the same thing with born children and grown-ups—and of course it both is and is not the same thing. It is not the same thing chiefly because we have decided that a group of human beings have no rights. So, yet further, the incidence of involuntary euthanasia (killing people who do not want to be killed) may one day reach the level that it is today in the Netherlands. That would be many thousands of killings per year. Even then, we will be told, that is nowhere near the scale of the Holocaust and, anyway, many of those people might want to be killed if they only knew what was best for them.

By making the Holocaust the measure of evil, we set an unreasonably high standard, so to speak. Whatever we have done and now do and may do in the future, it is certainly not *that* bad. It is as though we were to take a somewhat relaxed view of murderers who operate on a scale that falls short of Charles Manson or Jeffrey Dahmer. But then we remember the rabbinic wisdom that to save one life is to save the world; and its obverse, to kill one life is to kill the world. Not literally, of course, but morally, which is much more important. Genocide began with the first morphine overdose given a harelipped baby. Stefan Kühl's *The Nazi Connection* documents much more than its author knows, or at least much more than he says. It makes disturbingly clear that

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many of the most respectable, most influential, and most progressive scientific minds of this century laid the intellectual and moral groundwork on which the Nazis built, and cheered them on as they were building.

Later, most of these Nazi sympathizers would adamantly insist that that is not what they had meant, that is not what they meant at all. But the ideas are what matter, and in many cases they did not and have not disowned the ideas. The word "eugenics" does not appear in the annual report of the Rockefeller Foundation, but it does not take a cryptologist to recognize the euphemisms. "It" assumes many forms. While we work ourselves up into a fine heat shouting "Never again!" it is happening again.

FT

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON, ALMOST

On a more personal note, but one not unrelated to the concerns addressed in these pages, my sister Mildred has been sorting through the heaps of letters, photos, and family oddments accumulated by Mom before she moved to the nursing home a few months ago at age ninety-two. Mildred has been mailing packets of selected materials to the eight children, and I am surprised to be learning things about my parents different from what I thought I knew. As with most small children, I suppose, I was endlessly fascinated by my parents' stories about "the olden days," meaning mainly the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, the decade before my birth. Years ago I wrote out a reflection by a Llewelyn Powys and recently came across it again: "The years lived by our father before he begot us have upon them a wonder that cannot easily be matched. . . . In some dim way we share in those adventures of this mortal who not so long ago moved over the face of the earth like a god to call us up out of the deep."

The packet reveals that I wrote more often to my folks than I had remembered, in more detail, and more affectionately. Dad died at age seventy-two in 1972, and I have often thought that the life I have lived is in very large part his, but that is a long and complicated story that need not delay us here. More to the point is a document in the packet sent by Mim that is dated May 14, 1941. It is a paper given by the Rev. C. H. Neuhaus to the Ontario District Pastoral Conference, and in it he challenges a proposal by the Canadian government for the moral and religious education of children in the public schools. Apparently the paper met with the approval of his colleagues in the ministerium of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and was given some wider distribution in Canadian church circles. It is, so far as I know, the only extensive statement by Dad on religion and public policy, and this son cannot read it without entertaining a question about how it is that arguments and dispositions are transmitted from one generation to another. I very much doubt that it is in the genes. Certainly Dad and I had not discussed these matters in any detail, in fact hardly at all, and yet I discover more than fifty years later that—with a smidgen of difference here and there—his arguments are mine, and that the issues he addressed in 1941 are not all that different from those being disputed in 1994.

It was wartime of course, Canada having gone into it with Britain in 1939, and the government, as is the wont of governments, wanted religion to rally more fervently around the flag. (That was when Canada still had a flag, before Prime Minister Lester Pearson fobbed off on the long-suffering Canadians a red maple leaf contrivance that has all the gravitas of a supermarket logo.) The government proposed putting religion courses into the public schools, such courses to be taught by the several clergymen of each school district. Keep in mind that in Ontario public schools were and are distinct from "separate" schools, the latter being Catholic schools supported by public funds. For all practical purposes, public schools were Protestant schools—Protestant being defined as non-Catholic. Dad thought the government proposal a very bad idea, and in these nine now yellowed single-spaced pages he sets out twelve reasons for his opposition. (He was a most methodical man.) I will but touch on some highlights.

First, he contended that the climate of wartime was not conducive to "sober and calm deliberation" of such an important question. If the proposal must be considered, it should be put off until after the war. Meanwhile, those clergy who favored the proposal should not exploit their positions of influence. As becomes evident, he had chiefly in mind the clergy of the Anglican Church and the United Church of Canada, the mainline Protestant denominations toward which he harbored some suspicion. "Clergymen," he wrote, "are not 'a superior form of humanity.' 'Good intentions' on their part are no more worthy of special consideration in a *Democracy* than are the 'good intentions' of an atheist. The moment you depart from this ideal of *Democracy* you cease being democratic and are preparing the soil for future bureaucracy and dictatorship." It is noteworthy that throughout the paper "democracy" is upper case and underlined, which turns out to be no mere stylistic eccentricity.

Religious instruction in the public schools, Dad argued, "is one step toward State Religion." His

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animus toward state religion was grounded in the experience of the Saxons who fled the state church of Prussia and founded the Missouri Synod in 1847. It was also based in his pastoral experience with immigrants from state churches who produced their church tax receipts as bona fides of their good standing as Lutheran Christians. The religious instruction proposal was indeed a small step, but Dad urged that it be seen in the light of the ambitions of some to establish a national church. He made clear that he was not speaking of the Roman Catholic Church, for which he had considerable respect. "I mean two large Protestant denominations in Canada. Members and clergy of the one have made the impression on me that they believe their church should be The Official Church by right of inheritance or by virtue of the former special recognition by the British Crown. The other large body is on record with these words, 'that this settlement of unity may in due time, as far as Canada is concerned, take shape in a Church which may fittingly be described as national.'" The first denomination was, of course, the Anglican, and the second the United Church of Canada, which was formed by a merger of Presbyterians, Methodists, and some others in the 1920s. In a *Democracy*, Dad said, they can preach their ideas from their denominational housetops, but they should not be given access to "the housetop of tax-supported public schools."

Moreover, clergy cannot teach, as was proposed by the government, a nondenominational religion. Dad wondered about the integrity of clergy who would go along with such a plan: "Will he not feel that he is a traitor to his own beliefs and to the church to which he has bound himself whenever he answers questions in such a manner as to give equal value to opposite views and interpretations?" Then, sounding for all the world like a premature postmodernist attacking putatively universal perspectives, Dad wrote, "My conviction is that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as nondenominational religion. If you disagree in some point with all the existing denominations then you form a new denomination of at least one member, whether you give your denomination a name or not. To be without opinion or belief is simply not human." He had on occasion tried, he said, to present evenhandedly conflicting interpretations of matters of importance, and it was his consistent experience that, despite his efforts, his own convictions asserted themselves "most unexpectedly." He did not have much confidence that most clergy would even try to make the effort.

He also opposed the government scheme because it would be "a further hindrance to an eventual Democratic settlement of the problem now existing between public and separate schools." His "dream" was that one day all school taxes would go into a common fund from which either all churches or no church could get support for their own schools. "At present the state's money is being used to teach only one religion in one church's schools." He was not opposed to the Catholic separate schools; he simply wanted other churches to have the same opportunity. The scheme for teaching in the public schools a religion "designed to suit Christian, Jew, and atheist" would delay a more just arrangement by creating a delusion among the majority Protestants that the question of religious instruction had been satisfactorily resolved, when in fact the religion being taught would satisfy almost nobody's idea of authentic religion.

Such instruction would, however, be identifiably Christian in some watered-down sense of the term, and that poses problems for non-Christians, no matter how small a minority they might be. The government scheme allowed that non-Christian children could be excused from religious instruction, but Dad thought that not nearly enough. He imagined a Jewish child thinking this way: "My father is a law-abiding citizen of this country which calls itself a Democracy. He is supposed to have the same rights and privileges as any other citizen of the land. When he pays his taxes the government never gives him a rebate because I do not get our kind of religion in the public schools. They say to my father that the religious instruction must be taken from the Christian Bible. If my father complains that this is not fair, he is told, 'If you don't like our arrangement, your boy can stay out during that time.' Queer thing this Democracy. You belong to it part of the time and part of the time you don't really belong." Dad opines, "Even a small neighborhood gang of boys demonstrates the true spirit of *Democracy* better than that. Will such a gang invoke the majority rule and insist on cooking a rabbit stew on Friday when they know that only one member, Mickey O'Brien, is not to eat meat on Friday?"

Moreover, an hour or two a week of such religious instruction would not be able to compete with the "pseudo-science" of secularism that is otherwise taught in the schools. "Which theory is going to be upheld, that monkeys became evolutionists or that evolutionists became monkeys?" Then too, sound moral instruction is unlikely since the clergy do not agree on the nature of sin or even on what is a sin. Among the examples he cites: "Will one condemn the modern mixed dance as sin and another classify it as highly desirable rhythmic recreation? Will one try to make the children believe that the Sabbath-laws of the Old Testament are still in force while another will say that they were abolished when Christ came? Will one present moderate drinking as a crime and another insist that only drunkenness is sin?" (The Missouri Synod was against dancing, indifferent to Sabbath laws, and positively disposed toward moderate drinking, with moderation very generously defined.)

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Dad also opposed the government scheme because he thought many clergy did not "stand for true principles of patriotism." He had the "rabid pacifists" of the liberal churches in mind, but he also worried about those who "taught a shallow, supercilious, hysterical brand of patriotism [that swings] too far towards the opposite extreme." He observed, "Just being a member of the clergy was no guarantee for a man's patriotism in the last war [World War I] and certainly is not so today." One detects a little needling of the establishmentarian mainline going on here. In World War I, German Lutherans were suspected of having a "dual loyalty," if they were not actually traitors. There were some instances of violence against Lutheran pastors, and almost everywhere there was pressure to drop German language services and other evidences of "foreignness." In 1941, by contrast, this German Lutheran pastor presents himself as the guardian of "true patriotism" against the mainline pacifists, on the one hand, and jingoists, on the other. Dad knew a thing or two about positioning oneself to forensic advantage.

In his most detailed objection to the government proposal, he excoriates the churches for evading their responsibility for the religious education of their children. Religious instruction in the public schools is a deceptively easy way out. "How disgracefully cheap is this arrangement! Cheapness in religious instruction has for so long been in vogue among the churches that the temptation to get still more even cheaper instruction by putting religion into the public schools is all but irresistible to some." Then, in his twelfth objection, he returns to the question of fairness. "There is a minority in our *Democracy* which prefers not to be bothered with our religion. For us to try to force religion on them in a public tax-supported school because we claim it is good for them may have the best intentions behind it, but nevertheless it is dangerous reasoning in a *Democracy*. . . . In a *Democracy* we love to speak of our sportsmanship. If you heard a person talking about shooting a fine buck and knew all the while that he had first set a snare for that buck to make sure that it couldn't get away, you'd be thoroughly disgusted with that man." The school truancy laws, he suggested, were like that snare, giving clergy a captive audience for their instruction. "I do not believe," he said in summary, "that this is becoming to a *Democracy*." (The analogy of children as targets should perhaps not be pressed too far, but Dad was an almost obsessive hunter and the analogy no doubt seemed to him quite natural.)

I suggested earlier that, mutatis mutandis, Dad's attitudes and arguments then were pretty close to mine now. The suspicion of civil religion or any religion under government auspices, the need for undiluted Christian witness, the imperative to respect differences, the devotion to democratic fairness, the impossibility of neutrality in matters of religious and moral consequence—all these seem as pertinent today as they were in the disputes of 1941. His "dream" of a common public fund from which people could get support for the schools of their choice is today's advocacy of vouchers and other measures to give parents real decision-making power in education. I suppose some readers might even detect a connection between Dad's objection to the pretensions of mainline churches and this writer's occasional criticisms of oldline liberalism in this country. If there is such a connection, it is not in the genes; it is in the continuing confusions of liberal Protestantism. Dad, who was by his seminary classmates called "Pope" Neuhaus, was a man of rather definite views. That, of course, is another difference between father and son.

As it happened, the scheme that Dad was protesting did go through, although he refused to participate in it. In my grade school we had Canon Phillips, the Anglican rector, come in once a week for our spiritual edification. Out of hearing, we students referred to him as "Canonball Phillips" and thought him awfully dull. I remember thinking him not too sharp as well, since he always got the numbering of the Ten Commandments wrong (Lutherans and Catholics count them the right way). He was a soft-spoken and no doubt quite admirable person, but Canon Phillips made no discernible impact on my spiritual consciousness, and certainly posed no serious religious alternative to a boy steeped in the true faith as promulgated by the Missouri Synod. The Catholics were something else; they were seriously different. In religious education, and perhaps in other respects, Dad wanted what the Catholics had. I expect he and Father Harrington of St. John the Baptist talked about such matters on their long deer hunting expeditions up in Algonquin country. They almost always came back with a fine buck or doe, usually with two. And I am sure they set no snares.

FT

THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS AND ACTIONS

We had thought to offer a few excerpts from a letter sent to President Clinton by eleven very prominent leaders in American evangelicalism, but the letter is so nicely put together that we gave up on that idea. Here's the whole thing:

"Dear Mr. President,

"We are sending you this open letter to express our deep concern over the State Department's cable last

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month to all diplomatic and consular posts asking them to pressure foreign governments to support greater abortion availability in the United Nations population-stabilization plan. The cable described access to legal abortion as a 'fundamental right of all women.'

"Mr. President, this is an unprecedented misuse of our diplomatic corps for political ends. We can think of no other time in history when American embassies were used to promote a domestic social agenda—particularly one that has bitterly divided our own people for more than two decades. The majority of Americans do not accept abortion as a 'fundamental right.'

"Moreover, the countries that the State Department is pressuring to embrace liberalized abortion policies, often in violation of their own laws, deeply resent what they rightly regard as cultural imperialism. The citizens of Africa, Asia, Central America, and South America are offended that the United States would urge them to refashion their own social policies to 'look like America.'

"Apart from the moral issue, which we consider paramount, how can we urge greater access to abortion in countries that often do not have antibiotics, ultrasound machines, or even sterile operating rooms? At a press conference on Capitol Hill, Dr. Margaret Ogola from Kenya pointed out that in remote regions of her country, clinics often lack life-saving medications, such as penicillin. If a surgical procedure like abortion were introduced into these regions, the result would be massive infections and death. Surely the United Nations' plan to slow population growth does not include mothers dying on unsafe operating tables.

"Mr. President, we remind you of the words of Mother Teresa that you yourself heard a few weeks ago at the National Prayer Breakfast. This tiny woman has spent her life working among the world's poor and understands their needs far better than any of us do. She said: 'The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion. . . . Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching the people to love but to use any violence to get what they want.

"In a recent interview with Peggy Wehmeyer of ABC News, you stated, 'I think there are too many abortions in America. I think there should be more adoptions in America.' During your campaign you proclaimed that abortions should be 'safe, legal, and *rare*.' How can these statements be reconciled with your cable to our embassies, directing them to promote abortions worldwide? How do they square with your recent allocation of federal dollars to agencies that perform or support abortions internationally? A chasm exists between your public pronouncements and the quieter actions of your Administration. We plead with you, Mr. President, not to make the United States an exporter of violence and death. Instead, we urge you to maintain our heritage as a beacon of morality and hope to the poor and suffering of the world.

"We respectfully ask that you direct the State Department to rescind last month's directive pressuring foreign governments to accept abortion on demand. America is at its best when we respect other nations' desire to nurture life, not destroy life.

"Respectfully," (Signed by Charles W. Colson, Dr. Charles Swindoll, Dr. Billy A. Melvin, Dr. William R. Bright, Dr. James C. Dobson, Dr. Edwin Young, Dr. D. James Kennedy, Rev. John M. Perkins, Dr. Joseph M. Stowell, Dr. Paul A. Cedar, Dr. Brandt Gustavson.)

FT

The Constitution vs. the Rule of Judges

A potentially constructive controversy surrounds Harry V. Jaffa's recent book on the Constitution (*Original Intent and the Framers of the Constitution: A Disputed Question*, Regnery). Jaffa, a constitutional scholar and long a prominent figure in conservative intellectual circles, has taken it upon himself to smite hip and thigh conservatives who do not accept his contention that the Constitution is anchored in the principles of natural law (as in "we hold these truths to be self evident") and should be interpreted in that light. He is particularly harsh, indeed downright disagreeable, in his attacks on Judge Robert Bork, Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and former Attorney General Edwin Meese, but his polemical sweep takes in a host of others who do not subscribe to his version of the "original understanding."

In an extended critique in *National Review*, Bork pulls out most of the stops in making the case that Jaffa's argument is incoherent, disingenuous, and finally inconsequential. Inconsequential because the main issue that seems to be at stake in Jaffa's disputation is the interpretation of the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision and Federal jurisdiction with respect to slavery. But, if Jaffa's view is accepted, it would have much wider implications for interpreting the Constitution. Without going into detail, Bork's point is that the Constitution reflects the practical experience of the Founders, and is not the product of a "general theory"—whether the general theory be based on natural law or something else. Bork notes that he has addressed these questions in response to more temperate critics in the pages of First Things (March 1992 and May 1992), and he does not take kindly to Jaffa's accusation that this view of the

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Constitution makes him a moral relativist. In his personal capacity, says Bork, a judge may be a great moral philosopher, but in the assigned task of interpreting the Constitution he must be a legal positivist who attends to the text and does not impose his own views on what the Constitution actually says.

There are a number of important questions engaged in this dispute. With Jaffa, one might have considerable sympathy for Abraham Lincoln's insistence, at the supreme moment of national crisis, that the Constitution be understood in light of the truths proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence. But there would seem to be no getting around the fact that those truths are not explicitly stated in the Constitution, and it is the Constitution that judges are sworn to uphold. The Constitution is an agreement, and in this respect it is not unlike a contract. Unlike the Declaration, it is not a statement of philosophical principles so much as a reflection of deals struck (on, for example, slavery and state religious establishments). The contract was made within a historical context marked, to be sure, by shared philosophical and religious presuppositions.

Almost all of those involved in the writing and ratification of the Constitution held such presuppositions and, in addition, had a strong sense that destiny, even Providence, was engaged in what they were doing. One might say that the Constitution is a contract within the context of a covenant; an agreement on what will be done in practice in the light of principles and hopes broadly shared. The covenantal sensibility and the general principles can at points help us determine the "original understanding" that informed the Constitution. Theology, philosophy, and moral sensibility form the cognitive "background" of the document, so to speak, but the founders were not entirely agreed on principles and were even less agreed on what principles should mean in practice (slavery being the most obvious instance of disagreement). In the face of significant disagreements, the Constitution is the product of negotiations about the federal polity by which the states would bind themselves. One is impressed in reading the numerous documents in the magnificent two volumes recently issued as *The Debate on the Constitution* (Library of America) at how very practical and unphilosophical were most of the matters disputed by federalists and antifederalists alike.

The most exigent concerns were for liberty and prosperity. Of course the meaning of liberty, prosperity, and other aspects of the common good invite careful philosophical reflection, but one is struck by how much the founders thought that the philosophical and moral underpinnings could be taken for granted. The debate over the Constitution was very little about the meaning of the constituting ideas and very much about the mechanics of protecting the realities to which those ideas refer. Terms of office, the pros and cons of a standing army, executive prerogatives, the division of functions between houses of Congress, the power of states in federal elections—these and a host of other practical questions preoccupy the founding debates. The Constitution is what came out of this multifaceted and often confused process of dispute and decision. Widely shared philosophical assumptions did not determine every decision. Despite philosophical agreements, many questions could have been decided differently. Personalities, regional anxieties, ambition for office, and numerous other factors all played their part. A later generation may well think that some decisions should have gone the other way. Anticipating that contingency, the Constitution makes provision for its own amendment, and there have been twenty-six of them to date.

To say that the Constitution is a set of stipulated arrangements based on practical experience is not to say that general theory or principles are unimportant. Washington, John Adams, and others among the founders were publicly insistent that this experiment in republican governance could not have been created and cannot be sustained except by a vibrant popular belief in moral principles supported by religion and public virtue. Those principles, however, are not the subject of the Constitution itself. The Constitution provides for such principles to be given full play in the legislative procedures of this representative democracy. It is for legislators, not judges, to invoke moral vision, philosophical argument, and general theory in making the case for the enactment of their proposals. As Judge Bork has persuasively explained in *The Tempting of America* (1990), activist judges have in recent decades put themselves in the place of the legislature. This illegitimate preemption of power has the ironic result that judges feel free to do what they are forbidden to do while forbidding legislatures to do what they are required to do—namely, make law by reference to moral principle and general theory. Thus, for example, courts impose their notion of the "nonestablishment" of religion in a manner that forces legislatures into a "strict separationism" that ends up with laws requiring religion to retreat wherever government advances.

As the Declaration and other documents of the founding period make unmistakably clear, those responsible for the Constitution believed that there is a "higher law," sometimes expressed in terms of natural law, sometimes in terms of reason and common sense, sometimes more explicitly in terms of biblical revelation. These beliefs are even more pronounced if one takes into account the several state constitutions when trying to understand the historical context of the constitutional process. But

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the ideational background of the constitutional process is not the Constitution itself. The Constitution itself is notably devoid of philosophical or moral affirmations. This, as the Marxists were fond of saying, is no accident. Those involved in the writing and ratification of the Constitution were eager not to get bogged down in disputation over first principles. They devised a polity of practical arrangements, which arrangements include a judiciary charged with the modest task of making sure that the provisions of the Constitution are not violated. (Indeed, even that statement of the task may be too immodest, since it is not the text of the Constitution but only later experience that established that, for instance, the Supreme Court had the authority to declare laws passed by Congress unconstitutional.)

In recent decades, judges have increasingly acted as though they were appointed to be philosopher kings. Those who criticize this liberal "judicial activism," however, often seem to favor conservative judicial activism. That is, they are against the current crop of philosopher kings not because they act like philosopher kings but because they have the wrong philosophy. In activist literature on the right one frequently encounters the proposal that judges should be appointed who favor "traditional morality," or even that the courts need more "Christian judges." If Bork and those of like mind got it right, this way of thinking is utterly wrongheaded. Among other things, it increases social acceptance of the courts' usurpation of the legislative power. On the bench we need people who, whatever their philosophy on other matters, impose upon themselves self-denying ordinances in the exercise of their authority. In this view, citizens who want laws more in accord with moral truth should direct their energies to the legislature, electing representatives of like mind and holding them accountable to their declared positions. And then citizens can only hope that the laws enacted will not run up against judges who think it is their right, even their duty, to override the judgment of the people's representatives with their allegedly more enlightened understanding of the common good.

Although the terms of debate change from time to time, the questions engaged by Bork and Jaffa (and many others) have been with us for a long time. In our judgment, the Bork understanding of how this constitutional order is supposed to function is convincing. At the same time, there are those who agree with that judgment but who also believe that we have drifted so far from the intention of the founders that there is no going back to the jurisprudence of "original understanding." We have to accept the fact, they say, that the judiciary has become a thoroughly politicized institution and we therefore have no choice but to work politically to replace "their" philosopher kings with "ours." If we must be ruled by judges, they tell us, better that they rule by the dictates of natural law than by the moral relativism and emotivism that currently prevail in the courts. Whether they acknowledge it or not, those who have reached that doleful conclusion would seem to have given up on the American constitutional experiment as a lost cause. People who care about the moral legitimacy of the American regime should not lightly acquiesce in that conclusion.

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A Jesuit Awakening

The Superior General of the Society of Jesus, often called the black pope, has written to communicate his dissatisfaction with an item appearing in these pages in the April issue. Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach asks us to "rectify the damage you have done to the Society's name among your readers by publishing a more accurate account of the Society's commitment to human life in all aspects, including the life of the unborn." Father Kolvenbach is a discerning, devoted, and very personable man whose wishes we are eager to accommodate, but this one may be difficult.

Readers may recall that we had commented favorably on a long letter by Fr. John Conley, a Jesuit at Fordham, that was published in the *National Jesuit News*. Fr. Conley pointed out that the Society of Jesus had, to say the very least, a very undistinguished record when it comes to addressing the "unspeakable crime" (Vatican Council II) of abortion. More specifically, he criticized the preparatory materials for the General Congregation (GC) of the Society, which is to be held in 1995. In those materials, abortion is barely mentioned, and the few references to the subject are buried in long catalogues of other concerns that appear to have greater priority, ranging from environmentalism, racism, capitalism, women's rights, and drug addiction to illiteracy. Fr. Kolvenbach included with his letter a letter in response to Fr. Conley by Fr. Paul Soukup of Santa Clara, California, which was also published in the *National Jesuit News*. Fr. Soukup was involved in the preparation of the materials for the GC and, it seems to us, his letter only strengthens Fr. Conley's criticism.

Of the working groups that prepared the materials, Fr. Soukup writes that "the international nature of the Society demanded a certain global perspective that precluded lengthy treatment of even vital local issues." It is exceedingly curious that abortion should in any sense be considered a local

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issue. "However, within those constraints, more than one group did address the question," writes Fr. Soukup. "My daily notes indicate several discussions about abortion and how we might respond to it. But the sheer volume of other themes and the limited space in the final documents meant that the written comments had to be brief." Fr. Conley's complaint, however, was not that the comments on abortion were brief but that the few passing references to abortion were overwhelmed and relativized by what Fr. Soukup calls "the sheer volume of other themes."

The very muted witness of the Society of Jesus with respect to abortion, we wrote, "is in sharpest contrast with the Second Vatican Council, the public witness of the bishops, and the urgencies that animate the ministry of John Paul II." We regret that there is no reason to withdraw that judgment. Fr. Kolvenbach protests our conclusion "that the Society of Jesus, as distinct from many of its members, has become a net liability as the Catholic Church travels into the Third Millennium." *America*, the Jesuit magazine published here in New York, also took editorial umbrage at that statement. In fact, however, we did not say that that is our conclusion. We said that "some of those who know the Society well and love it deeply" are reflecting upon "the possibility" that the Society has become such a net liability. We know from numerous conversations, including conversations with distinguished Jesuits, that that question is being asked. Our own conclusion is that all who care about the life and mission of the Catholic Church should pray that the General Congregation of 1995 will witness a great reawakening of the constituting genius of the Society of Jesus. Whether or not that happens will, in very significant part, be indicated by the public urgency of the Society's concern for the children killed and the women exploited by abortion.

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WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ The World Council of Churches (WCC) has chosen Harare, Zimbabwe, as the site for its fiftieth anniversary assembly in 1998. The main argument for the site was that the impoverished churches of the South have much to teach the churches in the developed North. But not about homosexuality. The government there, with the support of the churches, lists sodomy as a crime. Said Johath Siyachitema, President of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, "The church in Zimbabwe is very clear on this. Homosexuality is a sin, and the government is acting in accord with the law." Some American and European representatives thought that was reason enough not to hold the assembly in Harare. Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America, however, argued that deciding the question on this issue could be the "opening wedge for a general discussion of homosexual behavior" that might imperil the future of the WCC. Recognizing that the WCC might not survive more imperiling, the opposition subsided. The North Atlantic champions of the feminist and gay agendas, being in thrall to the etiquette of multiculturalism, cannot bring themselves candidly to assert that on these and other questions the "people of color" to the South of us are culturally backward and underdeveloped, which is obviously what they believe. So the culturally forward and overdeveloped will, come 1998, gather in solemn assembly in Zimbabwe.

■ The Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation puts out these lovely television ads on the theme "Life. What a Beautiful Choice." You've probably seen them. Planned Parenthood doesn't like them at all. One ad shows a wriggling newborn next to an ultrasound video of a ten-week-old unborn baby moving in similar fashion. The ad says, "The only difference is that the baby on the left is already born, and the baby on the right would very much like to be." Alex Sanger of Planned Parenthood, the grandson of Margaret Sanger, complains, "This ad only gives half the story. The baby on the left is big. The fetus on the right is only a few inches long. There's no comparison. It's deceptive." Now let's see if we got this. Big. Little. Apparently that's all you need to know to master Planned Parenthood Ethics 101.

■ A couple of issues ago we noted Paul Kurtz's new book, which is subtitled "The Philosophy of Paul Kurtz." We wondered if it was a precedent to put one's own name in the subtitle of one's book. We should have known better. Here is an announcement from Scholars Press, which is bringing out *The Sociology of Andrew M. Greeley*. By Andrew M. Greeley. In the case of this book by Father Greeley, we can be sure that he is an authority on the subject.

■ Strange are the fantasies that feed alarmism. Item from the *Wanderer*: "Top Vatican officials have bluntly stated that the American Church is in material schism. What the Pope, surely, is trying to prevent is making this material, de facto, schism formal. He knows that bishops such as [here the names of three bishops least favored by conservatives] might start their own church at the slightest provocation, and that perhaps 70 percent of the clergy and 90 percent of the laity would follow them." That strikes us as utter fantasy. A remarkable thing about Catholics in America is that, no matter how strident their opposition to Church teaching and practice, they are adamant about being unquestionably members of the Church. And that means, minimally, being in communion with Rome.

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Further, in the United States, unlike Europe, Catholics are perfectly familiar with other churches and denominations that claim to be Catholic, and there is no significant defection to such groups. A bishop, whether on the right or the left, who set up his own church would have the following of perhaps a few thousand other religious eccentrics in this country, which is to say almost none. If indeed "top Vatican officials" say what the *Wanderer* says they say, they are as misinformed about the Church in America as are many other Vatican officials. Of course the *Wanderer* and kindred publications make no secret of their wish that liberals would formally leave the Church, but that is a quite another matter.

■ ERGO! That's the acronym of Euthanasia Research and Guidance Organization, a new outfit run by Hemlock Society founder Derek Humphry. They did a national survey on doctor-assisted suicide in which half the sample was asked questions employing euphemisms, while the other half were polled using blunter language. So it turns out that people are more likely to favor "physician's aid in dying" than "physician-aided suicide." An awful lot of people, it seems, still have inhibitions about suicide. The Hemlock newsletter draws the unsurprising conclusion: "Americans would be more likely to vote for a law allowing physician aid-in-dying if that law were written using euphemisms instead of more direct language." And the vote is more likely to carry if we could do something about those old people. According to one poll, the strongest support for euthanasia is among people aged eighteen to twenty-nine, while another survey found that two-thirds of medical patients over sixty-five opposed such measures while 80 percent of patients in their thirties were in support. It figures. It's a question of whether you're talking about "them" or "us."

■ This is embarrassing. It seems every time we mention something related to Irving Louis Horowitz an error creeps in. A few months ago we forgot to say that a book was published by Transaction, which Horowitz heads, and now we reviewed his book, *The Decomposition of Sociology*, saying it was published by Transaction when in fact it is published by Oxford. Be assured that this will not discourage us from making mention of Horowitz and his many impressive endeavors.

■ Further evidence that, after years of most determined effort, proponents have not been able to remove the opprobrium from the word "abortion": the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights has changed its name to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Abortion by any other name . . .

■ "Revisionists" who deny or belittle the Holocaust are hit hard in a joint statement by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Synagogue Council of America. The revisionists are coming in for increasingly critical attention from people who in the past hoped that they would just go away if ignored (see the review of Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust* and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Assassins of Memory* in February 1994 issue). In recent years, revisionists have adopted a more scholarly tone, muting explicit anti-Semitism, and calling for "open debate" on college campuses and elsewhere. The statement by the Catholic and Jewish leaders says: "The deniers then argue that the First Amendment should be read to impel university and college publications to publish whatever material they may choose to provide. This is a perversion of the First Amendment. All educational institutions and their publications, whether official or student sponsored, should unconditionally reject any efforts to deny the horrifying realities of the Holocaust." On this one, everyone seems to agree that censorship is a very good thing. Everyone except the revisionists, that is.

■ For many years Albert Shanker was a voice of sanity on numerous public questions, and still is. But as President of the American Federation of Teachers he seems to be locked into the vested interests of the union when it comes to anything touching education. To be sure, that might be expected of a union leader, but Shanker has at times demonstrated that he is not simply another union leader protecting organized labor's shrinking turf. His advertising column appears in newspapers and opinion magazines under the Reformational title "Here We Stand," but Shanker has regrettably little to say about genuine reform of public education. Week in week out, the message is monothematic: Pour more money into the existing public school system. That is the bottom line of almost every column by one who was once thought to be something of a statesman of public policy but is turning himself into a flack for the educational bureaucracy. There is no evidence of critical rethinking in the face of the undeniable fact that there is no discernible connection between public school expenditure and public school result. In fact, expenditures have in recent decades multiplied, while results have plummeted. Only the American Federation of Teachers and the National Educational Association seem oblivious to this reality. The missing component in the ideology of the unionized educational establishment is the family. Families and parents, when mentioned at all, are viewed as unwelcome competitors. So, in a recent column criticizing the role of volunteers in public schools, Shanker concludes, "We should stop working around the edges of the main institution concerned with children—the schools—and concentrate on making our schools moral communities." The main institution concerned with children? Surely the family is that. But in this Shanker column, as in so many others, the family is

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only mentioned as a failed institution that generates pathologies that are to be remedied, presumably, by the public school. The unions running the state school system will more believably present themselves as concerned for children—rather than for their job security and monopoly on public funds—when they show a decent respect for parents and families. Of course the Shankers fear that, if parents had a bigger say in things, they would take their children out of the state schools and put them in schools of their own choosing. The more those in charge of the public schools display contempt for families, the more parents will want to do precisely that.

■ There is something almost refreshing about an unvarnished admission of spinelessness. We have been sent copies of the correspondence between the legal services office of a major state university and a nearby physician who let some pro-life crisis pregnancy counselors use his office. The attorney for the university's legal office complained to the doctor that the counselors tried to dissuade a young woman from having an abortion. The woman, says the attorney, "requests that you no longer allow the University Pregnancy Crisis Center to do business in your office and that you not allow such activities to take place there in the future." The doctor's response concludes with this: "Since I have no strong convictions and do not want to be picketed or entail any legal expenses, I have acquiesced to your implied threats." It takes a kind of courage, no doubt perverse, to so straightforwardly confess to cowardice. On the other hand, in the absence of strong convictions, maybe neither courage nor cowardice come into play.

■ There is possibly no reason why you should ever have heard of Joseph W. Moylan of Omaha, Nebraska. But in a time of moral derangement his name should be noted. For many years he served on the Nebraska state court, and then the legislature passed a law requiring judges to authorize abortions when the parents of a minor would not give permission. Knowing what he would be required to do, Judge Moylan resigned. He refused to be complicit in what he recognized as an unspeakable evil. Just that. An apparently little thing. The local papers took notice, but it did not ignite any great furor of public attention. Maybe, however, here and there, a few people were prompted by Moylan's witness to think again about the responsibilities and opportunities of moral agency. When, please God, this dark night is past, people will remember Joseph Moylan and take heart from the fact that not everybody went along.

■ Those sneaky Christians are up to it again. A front page story in the *Washington Post* raises the alarm about conservative Christians who have the effrontery not only to run for office but to actually get themselves elected. Here is the insidious way they go about it: "The model stealth campaign, according to People for the American Way, took place here in San Diego County in 1990, when more than ninety conservative candidates ran for school board and other offices. By confining their campaigns to churches, the group charged, these candidates were able to mobilize a potent constituency without alerting their opponents, and nearly two-thirds won their races. 'So successful were these "stealth" candidates that many of the long-term school board members who found themselves voted out of office that year reported later that they were frankly unaware that their re-elections were in any jeopardy whatsoever until election night,' Matthew Freeman, People for the American Way's research director, wrote in a report last year." The story does not say whether PAW's research director has figured out that board members might have discovered what is going on in their communities by going to church, or by talking to somebody who did. The implication is that PAW's kind of people don't go to church and it's unfair of church-going folk to have different ideas about how the schools should be run. People for the American Way is today's Un-American Activities Committee, indicting most of the American people for not being like People for the American Way. As the *Washington Post*'s current advertising slogan says, "If you don't get it, you don't get it."

■ Asked whether Christians must support unilateral disarmament, Jean Marie Cardinal Lustiger of Paris responds: "Unilateral disarmament is the transposition of the martyr's attitude to the collective plane of nations. The believer can and must sometimes assume this vocation after having recognized and chosen it spiritually: this has been done by many men and women across the centuries. But it is morally indefensible to propose to an entire people—to the detriment of its identity and present life—an ideal that politically is utopian. Obtaining such a political suicide through public pressure is unacceptable; the object of a spiritual choice cannot be imposed on a nation. Thinking that the spiritual laws of the Kingdom of God can be transformed into a mode of political management of human history is dangerously idealistic. That would imply believing and letting it be understood that the eschatological reconciliation had been realized everywhere, that the Kingdom of God and its justice had become terrestrial realities on a human and historical scale. The same is true for the notion of ownership, for the appropriation of possessions. Christ's disciples are urged to renounce their riches, but a society cannot be juridically constructed on a vow of poverty. That Christians in a society should endeavor to live in holiness and follow the evangelical counsel by renouncing worldly belongings is well and good, but morally they cannot make this a political requirement for their fellow citizens at the price of

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everyone's dignity and freedom. Disregard for material goods cannot be made obligatory: that would be a tyranny." An editor friend, incorrigibly Lutheran, is surprised that the Cardinal is such an exponent of Luther's "two kingdom theology." That's the way it is with some people; so enamored are they of their denominationally copyrighted formulas that they claim for them the wisdom of the entire world.

■ The book is published by the Linacre Centre in London and is now being made available here. *Euthanasia, Clinical Practice, and the Law* has had a gratifying influence in England, including influence on the House of Lords' select committee on euthanasia, and contains valuable information on euthanasia practice in the Netherlands and elsewhere. The paperback edition is available for $12.95 (hardcover $34.95) from Hackett Publishing Co., P.O. Box 44937, Indianapolis, IN 46244. Make checks payable to Hackett Publishing Co.

■ It's happening all over, of course, but we have occasion to take note when, for instance, somebody sends a clipping. Here's one from the student newspaper of Valparaiso University in Indiana, a school associated with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The University Senate approved a new discrimination policy. A discrimination policy means that you don't discriminate, not even on the basis of religion. Professor Gerald Speckhard protested that a Lutheran university has to discriminate on the basis of religion in order to remain Lutheran. He and others who wanted to exclude "religion" from the list of forbidden discriminations lost out to those who argued, so to speak, that "excluding the word gives a bad impression." Never mind that the school does give scholarships and grants based on a student's being Lutheran. Never mind that, like most schools, the university discriminates on the basis of race and ethnicity in order to increase "minority representation." Never mind other facts to the contrary. Being in the academy means not having to mean what you say. The important thing is not to give a bad impression—like, for instance, the impression that religion matters.

■ Elsewhere in this issue, Edward Shapiro reflects on the troubled (to put it gently) relationship between blacks and Jews. Glenn Loury of Boston University addresses that question in "The Alliance is Over" in the June issue of *Moment*. The machinations of Minister Louis Farrakhan & Co., says Loury, do not necessarily reflect a dramatic rise in black anti-Semitism. There is an important class factor involved. "What we see, when we look at this situation unflinchingly, is that, far from reflecting a mass anti-Semitic sentiment among poor blacks in the urban core, Farrakhan and company are marketing their hateful product to a select audience of relatively elite blacks, the ones who come most frequently into contact with Jews and who find that they come up short in the competition for status and resources in academe. Outside of New York City there is very little urban friction between blacks and Jews. It was not Jews, but Koreans, who were objects of attack in the Los Angeles riots. I doubt that your typical poor or working-class black urban resident spends much time reflecting on the 'crimes of Jews against blacks.' I am less confident about your typical black sociology major at a state university. The latter is the real audience for those copies of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that are being sold at a nominal fee by Farrakhan's organization." If there is hope for mending between Jews and blacks, says Loury, it is in the realm of the spiritual. "The one prospect for reconciliation that I see is rooted in the common spiritual heritage of these two peoples. Many blacks, like many Jews, are deeply religious. Blacks practice a brand of Christianity that takes the Old Testament witness of God's chosen people quite seriously. What blacks and Jews share that is most relevant to healing this current breach is not membership in the Democratic party, but rather a knowledge of the prophet Isaiah, a respect for the builder Nehemiah, an appreciation of the poet David. But contemporary public discourse has little tolerance for explicitly religious dialogue. Our focus is on elections, policy debates, power plays. We bring lawsuits, call news conferences, mount publicity campaigns. Where blacks and Jews pray together, to the same God, if in different tongues, is where our rifts are closest to being healed. It is interesting that a comparatively tiny number of Black Muslims, an explicitly religious cult, dominates public discussion of black-Jewish relations without being challenged on theological grounds by a mainstream black leadership drawn heavily from the Christian church." As to whether such a religiously informed black leadership will emerge, Loury is not holding his breath. His conclusion: "Despite my deep regret at the matter, I cannot be optimistic about the prospects that a 'special relationship' between blacks and Jews will ever be restored. Perhaps it is best to recognize this, rather than to incur the anguish and disappointment that inevitably accompanies attempts to sustain a marriage from which the love has long since departed."

■ If the book isn't enough for you, you can get the *complete* Haldeman diaries on CD-ROM. In the complete version Richard Nixon is quoted as saying that Billy Graham "has the strong feeling that the Bible says that there are satanic Jews and that's where our problem arises." Contacted by the *Wall Street Journal*, Graham said, "These are not my words and this does not reflect the high view I hold for the nation of Israel and for Jewish people, many of whom are my close friends." We believe Dr. Graham entirely. Now if one of those close friends

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would advise him on the inadvisability of that last clause. Frank Rich, columnist with the *New York Times,* apparently spent delightful hours playing with the CD-ROM, finding what new scraps of dirt he could on a man whom he dislikes very much. By using the computer's search function, he discovers, you can leap to every occurrence of the word "Jewish." Having leaped, Mr. Rich leaps some more to the suggestion that Nixon was, wouldn't you know it, an anti-Semite. Now we hold no brief for the late President. The moratorium on nastiness that lasted for a week after the funeral was mainly used to praise Nixon, with considerable justice, for his liberal achievements—massive expansion of the welfare state, the establishment of reverse discrimination as government policy, and a doctrine of detente aimed at resigning us to live with communism forever. The moratorium past, Mr. Rich regresses to the media's accustomed mode, reporting that, in addition to everything else about this horrible man, he was an anti-Semite. The evidence? Nixon told Haldeman that there were too many rabbis conducting the Sunday services that he sponsored at the White House. That White House service was, in our view, another of Nixon's less than brilliant ideas, but it's unclear how many rabbis he should have had in to prove he was not an anti-Semite. Some apologists for Nixon say he was just letting off political, not anti-Semitic, steam with some of his cracks about Jews. Mr. Rich writes this: "But in the unexpurgated diaries Mr. Nixon is cited as identifying 'our enemies' as 'youth, black, Jew' in 1970." It is too bad that Mr. Rich expurgates the statement that he takes to be the clincher for Nixon's anti-Semitism. But even if Nixon said what Rich alleges, so what? In 1970, the youth movement, blacks, and Jews were overwhelmingly opposed to Nixon. Recognizing your political enemies is not a matter of wrongful prejudice but of common sense. Mr. Rich seems to be suggesting that anti-Semitism is a matter not of not liking Jews but of not being liked by Jews. As we read him, Frank Rich has enough reasons for despising Richard Nixon without making up another.

■ Getting your position to be perceived as "centrist" is of course a big leg up in public policy disputes. It is permissible to be somewhat left of center "liberal" or somewhat right of center "conservative," but people who are out to win public arguments flee like the plague the perception that they are left-wing radical or right-wing radical. The American Civil Liberties Union has been remarkably successful over the years in presenting itself as respectably liberal, and even at times exhibits its "conservative" credentials, in the libertarian sense of conservative. This is, to put it politely, a con job, as William A. Donohue makes clear beyond doubt in a new book titled *Twilight of Liberty: The Legacy of the ACLU* (Transaction). With a fine mix of scholarship, analysis, and polemic, Donohue lays bare the truly radical aims and achievements of the ACLU. Focusing exclusively on liberty as liberation from social and moral constraints, the ACLU's vision of society has room only for the atomized individual and the state. Whether always deliberate or not, the ACLU's practice is to eliminate the mediating institutions (e.g., family, church, voluntary associations) that stand between the individual and the state. The result, predictably, is to greatly increase state control of the society—and all this in the name of civil rights and freedom. "This book is a much-needed antidote to pernicious trends in our national life," says Robert Bork, and he got it right. A voice from the gallery: "Well, it may be that the ACLU goes to extremes from time to time, but they also do a lot of good in protecting the little guy." The reason the ACLU goes to extremes with unsettling regularity is that the ACLU is an extremist organization. The gallery: "You mean extremist as in, for instance, 'The Ku Klux Klan is an extremist organization.'" Oh, that may be stretching, but not as much as you might think. Read the record, read what the ACLU says about its own purposes, read *Twilight of Liberty,* and then decide for yourself. As for our opinion, we would no more support the ACLU for the little good it may occasionally do than we would support Louis Farrakhan because he encourages black men to wear a shirt and tie.

■ True or false: The abortion rate in Japan is higher than in the U.S. Years ago, long before *Roe v. Wade,* when "liberalized abortion" was being debated here, Japan was regularly cited for its astronomically high abortion rate. This, in turn, was frequently attributed to their very different (and indifferent?) attitude toward the value of human life. In the 1950s the abortion rate in Japan, measured per 1,000 women, was a little over fifty; for the last ten years it has dropped to a little more than twenty. The abortion rate in the U.S. in the last decade has fluctuated between twenty-five and thirty. And far from being indifferent to life, the Japanese are much more explicit about the anguish and guilt involved in abortion. At shrines around the country, tens of thousands of little stone statues of the Buddhist saint Jizo are to be found, often wearing hand-knitted caps and surrounded by bottles, baby toys, and small gifts. Such is the public acknowledgment and grieving for children who never were, and yet hauntingly are. As Mary Ann Glendon has done so much to examine U.S. law in contrast to Europe, so Lynn D. Wardle does with respect to Japan. "Crying Stones: A Comparison of Abortion in Japan and the United States" is published in *New York Law School Journal of International and Comparative Law* (Numbers 2 & 3, 1993). The author notes, "This study has confirmed Professor Glendon's observation that the abortion laws of the United States are the most

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extremely individualistic laws known." It is a most instructive and unsettling article. Wardle is professor of law at Brigham Young University, and an offprint of the article may be obtained by writing him at the university, P.O. Box 28000, Provo, Utah 84602.

■ It's an embarrassment to be sure, but there's no denying the diminished interest in human rights questions, and of religious freedom questions in particular, since the demise of communism in most of the world (remembering that Cuba and China are still holding out, in their ways). Our concern should be for the people who are persecuted, tortured, and killed, and Christians need make no apology for being especially concerned for fellow-Christians. Yet the fact is that the concern was more intense (albeit not intense enough) when issues of religious persecution were a ploy in domestic disputes between anticommunists and anti-anticommunists. Some folk, thank God, are neither driven nor distracted by such political disputes. Nina Shea and the Puebla Institute, for example. Puebla assiduously tracks religious freedom around the world, speaking up for believers with dispassionate passion. They have just issued *China: Religious Freedom Denied,* which is available for $7 from 1319 18th Street N.W., Washington D.C. 20036. The people of Puebla do not tell us what U.S. policy toward China should or should not be. They do tell us about those who are suffering for the faith; and that we should care about them, tell others about them, and pray for them. A note to Puebla will get you on the mailing list. It's a beginning.

■ One of the most notoriously anti-woman decisions of the Supreme Court was *Buck v. Bell* (1927) in which the Court upheld the involuntary sterilization of mentally "defective" women. History has many ironies in the fire, one of which is that the National Organization of Women (NOW) is citing *Buck v. Bell* in support of a constitutional right to assisted suicide. This gets us into the complicated connections between abortion and euthanasia. People have a "right" to have done what's best for them, whether they think so or not, or can say so or not. Surely, for example, no "unwanted child" would want to be born. Thus also the move from voluntary to involuntary euthanasia. The move is almost inevitable if the right to suicide is modeled on the right to abortion. Courts are already invoking *Roe v.*

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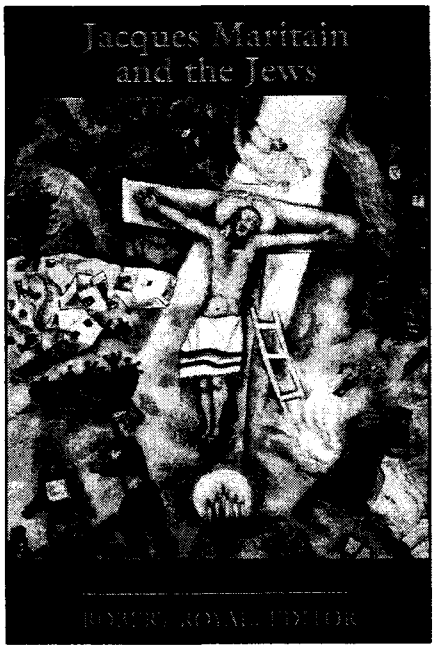

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Wade to order abortions for women who are mentally incompetent and could not make the decision for themselves. Judge Edward Heavey of Washington state, for instance, ordered a second-trimester abortion for a thirty-year-old mentally retarded woman on the grounds that "the normal woman under these circumstances would have an abortion." Similarly, the courts can readily determine the circumstances in which a "normal" patient would want to be killed, and then apply that standard to unconscious or incompetent patients who never asked to die. And all this, do not forget, in the name of "freedom of choice."

■ One need not be a partisan of any of the several conservatisms current in American thought to appreciate Russell Kirk's contribution to our political culture. His most celebrated book, *The Conservative Mind,* was not welcomed by a post-World War II intellectual establishment that had come to almost unanimous agreement on the ideology they titled "the end of ideology." Liberalism, it was confidently asserted, is the only game around. It seems a long time ago that Lionel Trilling of Columbia could suggest that conservatism is a set of irritable mental gestures pretending to be ideas. Years later Trilling himself would become something of a patron saint for those who are called neoconservatives. Kirk was robustly skeptical of the "neocons," but he helped create the climate in which that and other challenges to regnant liberalisms emerged. Certainly the revival of interest in Edmund Burke over the last three decades owes a great deal to him. Russell Kirk gave himself unstintingly in teaching, lecturing, writing, and cultivating the talents of young people who had awakened to the truth that the spiritually stifling doctrines of secular modernity are not the only way, and not the best way, of understanding our limits and possibilities as human beings. He came back again and again to what he called The Permanent Things, among which are not our earthly lives. Russell Kirk died April 29, the day of St. Catherine of Siena. They had in common their faith, and their defiance of all who would trim that faith to the fashions of the times. To his gracious wife Annette our heartfelt sympathy, and for Russell, *Requiescat in Pace.*

■ Now that the National Council of Churches appears to be turning itself into a modest think tank, we have, readers will recall, suggested the possibility of a merger, specifying of course that we cannot assume the NCC's liabilities. One of the advantages for the NCC would be the possibility of moving back to 156 Fifth Avenue, a building that was sold in the 1940s in order to build the "Godbox" at 475 Riverside Drive, which is not upstate but getting there. We were put in mind of this when reading John Espey's engaging stories about growing up in the 1920s as the son of Presbyterian missionaries stationed at South Gate near Shanghai (*Minor Heresies, Major Departures: A China Mission Boyhood,* University of California Press). Espey recalls that as a boy he had some very odd notions about America, including the idea that the Washington everybody talked about was the state on top of Oregon. That, he reports, did not prevent his getting A's in American history. Espey had more important things on his mind. "Washington had early been displaced as the center of all American life by 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City, New York, U.S.A. This address was, as everyone should know, the home of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. It was a perfectly respectable building, rather gloomy and drafty, where the menservants and the handmaidens of the Lord successfully disguised themselves to look like everyone else in New York. But in my youth 156 Fifth Avenue was the earthly representation of heaven, the temple of the Lord in the New Jerusalem. Its corridors sparkled with golden pavement; its lamps were glowing carbuncles; the rooms and halls were lined in chalcedony, marble, alabaster, and beryl; the fragrant furniture was made from the cedars of Lebanon; and within the central courts, each on a jewel-studded throne of Ophir, sat the High Priests who always saw to it that the humblest workman at South Gate was worthily paid for his hire." Espey overdoes it a bit, but that gives you a sense of the inducement for the NCC to think about moving in with us. Lest expectations be disappointed, we should add that the thrones of Ophir are all occupied.

Sources: On WCC in Zimbabwe, *Christian Century,* February 23, 1994. Alex Sanger on DeMoss pro-life ads, *Christianity Today,* March 7, 1994. On "schism" among U.S. Catholics, *Wanderer,* March 3, 1994. On ERGO! and euthanasia statistics, *Life at Risk,* March 1994. Statements on Holocaust denial quoted in *Catholic New York,* March 24, 1994. Shanker advertisement in *New Republic,* April 11, 1994. On spineless doctor, personal correspondence. Resignation of Judge Moylan, from personal correspondence. On PAW and "stealth" candidates, *Washington Post,* May 12, 1994. Cardinal Lustiger on unilateral disarmament, *Choosing God—Chosen by God* (Ignatius Press). On discrimination policy at Valparaiso University, *The Torch,* April 22, 1994. Billy Graham quoted on Jews, *Wall Street Journal,* May 23, 1994. Frank Rich on Nixon and anti-Semitism, *New York Times,* May 29, 1994. On connections between euthanasia and abortion, *Life at Risk,* March 1994.

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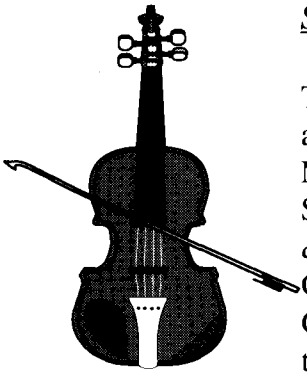

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